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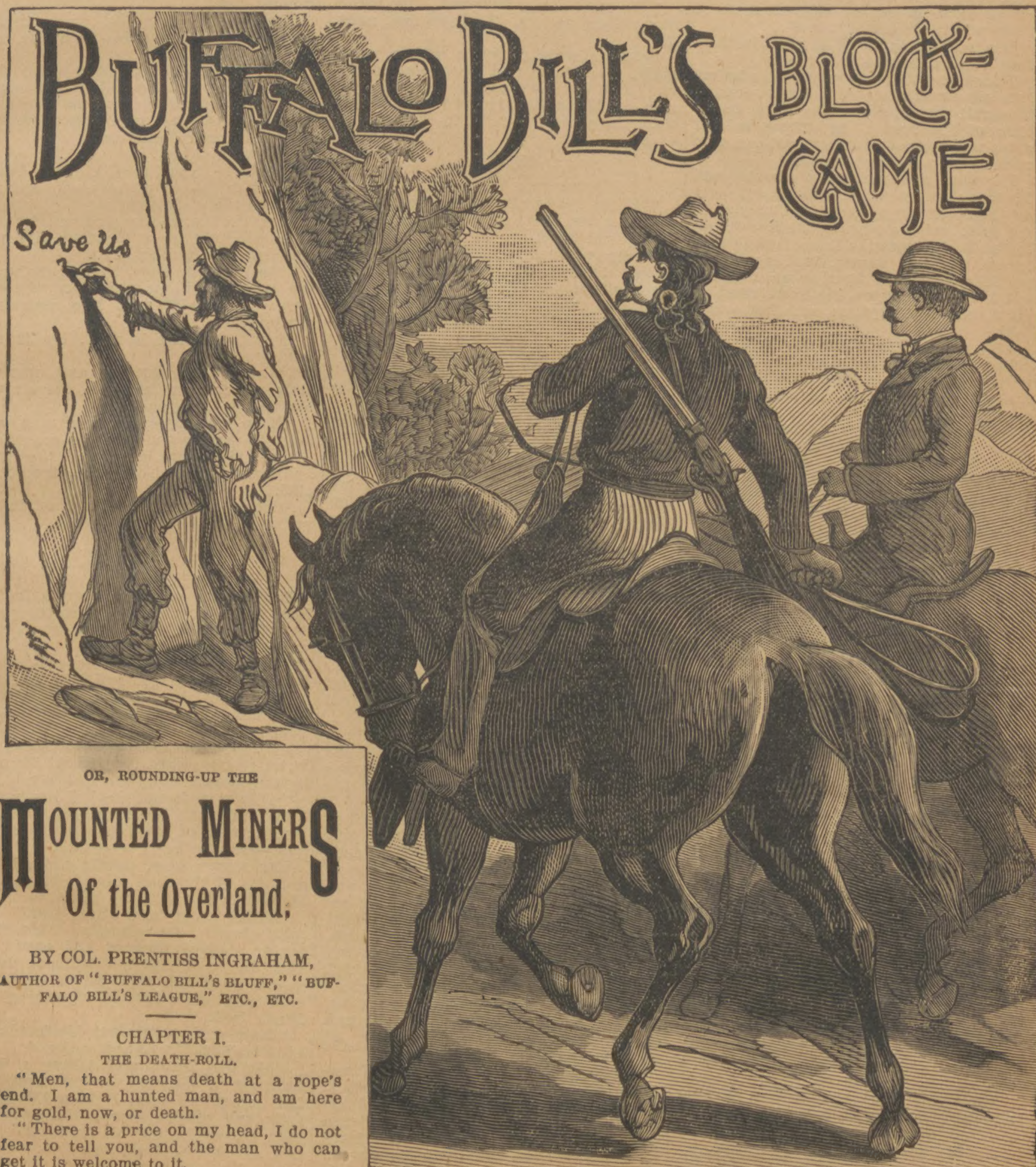
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OR, ROUNDING-UP THE

MOUNTED MINERS Of the Overland.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "BUFFALO BILL'S BLUFF," "BUFFALO BILL'S LEAGUE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE DEATH-ROLL.

"Men, that means death at a rope's end. I am a hunted man, and am here for gold, now, or death.

"There is a price on my head, I do not fear to tell you, and the man who can get it is welcome to it.

"Which one of you now wishes to play the coward and fears to follow my lead?

BUFFALO BILL HAD HIS LARIAT IN HIS HAND, READY TO THROW AT A MOVEMENT OF THE MAN.

"It is death or a fortune:—who will take the chances?"

The words were uttered in a tone of mingled desperation and defiance, and the speaker cast his eyes over the group of nearly a dozen men, as he spoke.

He stood with his back to a cliff, rising some forty feet above him, and as smooth as a wall as it ran along on either side from him.

Before him, and facing him as they stood in a row, some ten feet distant, were as hard a lot of citizens of the genus desperado as one could meet even in that wild land.

They were of the type that have left a black page in the early history of the mighty West, but who fade away before the advancing tread of civilization.

Bearded, long-haired, sunbrowned men, with faces which evil deeds had indelibly stamped, armed thoroughly for deadly work, roughly clad, and with restless, piercing eyes peering out from under the broad brim of their slouch-hats, they were the very ones to be led into devilry by one who appealed to them as had the speaker who so defiantly had told them that upon his head a price was set.

The same might be said of most of those who heard him, if not all.

His bold words found an echo in their hearts and they uttered a cheer.

The person they regarded with admiration was small of stature, slender, dressed in a suit that spoke of the East, rather than of the border, but whose belt of arms was worn with the air of one who well knew how to use them.

He wore a sombrero, top-boots, and his face was bearded, his hair long.

"There are two of us in this plot to get gold, and the other is the leader, not I; but he deserves the title of captain, if, arrant devilry, daring, and nerve are worth anything in figuring up a record out here, while upon his head, dead or alive, there are prices set that count high.

"He will lead, and our duty will be to follow; and mark my words, he will enrich us all, for the stages, the gold trains, and all else in which there is pay dirt will be our game.

"I know some of you; others I do not know; but you were picked out as men to tie to for any deed.

"You shall have the best horses, weapons, and outfit which can be secured, and your pay will be good, for the risks of death on the gallows are great.

"Now, step forward one by one, and sign the Death Roll, as you pledged yourselves to do when you were selected for the work in hand and were told to come here and meet me."

He was standing by the side of a large boulder with a flat surface, and as he spoke he took from his pocket a white roll of paper, deeply bordered with black.

There was a pile of gold pieces on the paper, and a skull and crossbones, while the writing on it was in red ink.

"I will read this to you, men, so that you will know just what you sign; but remember, there is no backing out, now that you know the secret.

"Listen!" and with this he read:

"I, ———, hereby pledge my life to the League of Mounted Gold Miners, to obey all laws and accept all consequences."

"It is short and to the point, but it means either life and fortune or death to the signer.

"Are you ready to sign?"

His eyes swept over the faces before him, when one of the men stepped forward and wrote down his name, with the pen handed to him, and in red ink.

A second did the same, and others followed, writing with more or less ease, and all but two had signed.

Those two remained in line, making no movement to come forward.

"I am waiting for you two men."

Neither moved, or uttered a word.

"What does this mean?" and the man's eyes glared upon them.

"Say, cap, I hain't a-goin' ter write

down my death sentence," answered one of the men.

"Me, too, though I'm willing ter join ther outfit," added the other.

"Do you refuse to sign this Death Roll?" asked the leader, calmly.

"That's what I does."

"I hain't a-signin' no papers."

The others all looked at them in wonder.

What would the result be, for they had all pledged themselves to sign the Death Roll?

Then all eyes turned upon the leader.

He spoke in a tone that meant danger, as he said:

"When each man was selected to join this 'league, and told to come here, he knew he was taking his life in his hands.

"Do I understand that you refuse to sign this Death Roll?"

"Yes, I won't do it."

"Me too!"

"Men, you have signed, and you are members of the League of Mounted Gold Miners."

He addressed the crowd now.

All answered in the affirmative. Then followed the words:

"We must not be betrayed. The grave alone keeps secrets. You two men must die!"

Before a word could be said, a move made, there came two shots, almost like one, and the men who had refused to sign the Death Roll dropped their length upon the ground, a bullet in the brain of each.

CHAPTER II.

THE DEADLY LASSO.

The two shots singing a death-knell to as many men, fairly paralyzed the rest of the band.

It showed them that they had indeed placed themselves under the rule of one who held human life at his caprice, and who had thus taught them how thoroughly inflexible he was, and intended to be.

"Men, they were traitors, or intended to be, and so will I punish all such, for I represent one who will protect himself and those loyal to him.

"I hold your signatures to this Death Roll, and though I know that not one of them is your right name, still they hold you as you are known, and—"

He paused, for the men were beginning to arouse from the almost stupor they had felt at his sudden and murderous act.

They were looking at each other questioningly—were muttering, and it seemed as though a storm was brewing then and there, for they felt their power, eight to one, and a common thought came to each that they would not be at the mercy of a leader who would kill for the slightest provocation.

The life of none of them was safe, and their compact with a man so relentless must end then and there.

Such was the feeling of one and all, and their glances were from one to the other, to find a leader, one bold enough to denounce the murderer, and be the one to defy him.

But, as they looked, as the speaker paused, seeing trouble coming, and nerving himself to meet it, there suddenly came a dark object flying downward from the cliff over their heads, and what appeared to be a large snake encircled about the head of the one who held the fatal Death Roll in his hands. There was a tightening of the slender line, a twang as it was drawn taut, and then, upward was dragged a human form, held in a deadly grip, struggling, choking, yet borne upward steadily and surely until he swung in mid-air, an appalling sight to those below.

Speechless, bereft of the power of motion, so sudden, so quickly, for it had not taken five seconds of time, had the startling deed been done, that the men had only seen the form of their leader dragged from the earth by unseen hands, and there left hanging upon their appalled sight.

But, they were quickly awakened from their daze by seeing a man appear on the very edge of the cliff and while revolvers were leveled upon them they heard the threatening words:

"The man that moves, I kill!"

"Surrender, or take the consequences!"

"Boys, that's Buffalo Bill!"

"Hands up, for he's got us cornered, and that means certain death!"

One of the men had recognized the tall form, the stern and handsome face of the one above them on the cliff.

They had wanted a leader but a moment before.

They had intended to rebel against the merciless man into whose power they had placed themselves in signing that Death Roll.

Now that man swung in mid-air, gasping for breath, a warning most terrible.

Their hands, with one exception, went upward.

That exception knew best what surrender meant to him. It was to chance a bullet, or later certainly die on the gallows.

He made one spring for liberty and dropped dead.

"Riddle every man that moves, men!" was the stern command from the tall man on the cliff.

There were fringes of pines and bushes along the edge of the cliff, which might hide half a hundred men, as the outlaws thought, and men think quickly under such circumstances.

"We surrender!"

"Don't let your men kill us, Buffalo Bill!" called out the man who had recognized the great scout.

"See that you obey orders, for my pardons are only too anxious to wipe you out," came from above.

"See that you stand as you are," and the scout gave an order to whoever were on the cliff with him, and then continued:

"I will lower this man. He is not dead yet."

The scout disappeared and immediately the form swinging in the air was lowered to the ground.

"Keep your eyes on them, men, and drop the man that moves," the scout called out. With that he grasped the lariat and swung himself over the edge of the cliff.

Another moment and he stood in the presence of the outlaw band!

CHAPTER III.

THE SCOUT'S BOLD PLAY.

Defiant and commanding was Buffalo Bill, as he stood there under the shadow of the cliff, facing the seven men whom he had captured.

There lay the two bodies whom the bullets of the leader had laid low, and a few paces distant was the form of the man who had attempted to dash away.

At the scout's feet was the leader, the lariat just loosened from about his neck by the scout.

"This man is not dead, I can revive him; but, first, to secure you. Remember, a move of resistance is the signal for your death."

The words were calmly uttered, and not one of the men moved, but all remained with uplifted hands.

"Right about face, all of you!" The men obeyed with alacrity. Then their captor stepped forward and each man was disarmed, their weapons being placed upon the rock which had been used as a table for the signing of the Death Roll.

"Now, each man clasp his hands behind his back!" was next ordered.

This was done, and taking a lasso hanging at the belt of the man who had recognized him, Buffalo Bill skillfully and quickly bound the hands of each outlaw behind his back, and thus had the men secured, and held together by the line going from one to the other.

Leaving them with their backs turned

to the cliff, the scout bent over the man his lariat had dragged up into the air.

The face was black, the neck discolored, the eyes set, but the breast heaved convulsively.

With the air of one who knew just what to do, Buffalo Bill begun the work of resuscitation.

The shirt was opened, the belt taken off, the throat and hands rubbed hard, and water from the scout's canteen poured into the face and upon the head.

Then a swallow of liquor from a small flask the man had in his pocket was placed between his lips.

It seemed for awhile doubtful as to what the result would be, but, at last, the breast heaved more and more convulsively, and life begun to control the limp form once more.

"It seems cruel to bring him back to life again to die upon the gallows; but I am no hangman; and only did what I did to capture him," avowed the scout, speaking aloud, more to himself than to the prisoners.

A few more minutes and the man, so near death a short while before, arose, suddenly, to a sitting posture, rubbed his throat, and, as his eyes fell upon the men before him, but with their backs turned toward him, their hands bound, he asked huskily:

"What does this mean?"

"Simply that you and your gang are my prisoners, Bob Brass," said the scout, who stood just behind the man.

One quick glance, and the returning color fled from the face again, as the lips uttered the words:

"Buffalo Bill!"

"Yes, if you like that name better than William F. Cody," was the reply.

"I would rather it was the devil."

"You came very near having your wish, Bob Brass, for I had a hard time to fetch you back from the confines of Hades."

"Yes, I remember now, how I was dragged upward by a rope about my neck. You did that, then."

"Yes. My lasso it was!"

"And you brought me back to life?"

"After hard work, yes."

"To hang me?"

"I suppose that will be the result, from what I know of you, Bob Brass."

"And these men?"

"Are my prisoners."

"Are you alone?"

"If you will glance upward among the bushes fringing the edge of that cliff you will be answered."

The man did glance upward, but his eyes fell upon the lasso still hanging over the cliff-edge, and with a shudder he cared to see no more.

After a moment he said:

"I suppose I owe you my life."

"Don't mention it."

"If Buffalo Bill hadn't chipped in and won the game, we would have just filled you with lead, for we didn't like your murder of those two men."

This was uttered by the man who had first recognized Buffalo Bill.

"Then it seems I have to twice thank you for my life, as these cowards would have killed me had not you appeared upon the scene."

"Again I say, don't mention it; but are you able to ride now?"

"Where?"

"Where I please to take you."

"Ah, yes, I forgot—to be hanged. Yes, I am able to go, for resistance will be in vain."

"It will be, indeed."

"Hold out your hands."

The man obeyed, and Buffalo Bill snapped upon them a pair of steel manacles.

He had his last man thus secure.

CHAPTER IV. THE DISCOVERY.

Buffalo Bill now gathered up the weapons of the outlaws, rolled them in the handsome serape of the leader, and said:

"Where are your horses?"

"Down yonder in that meadow," answered the leader.

"We will go there. You lead the way."

From one to the other the men passed questioning looks. They evidently were growing suspicious and restless.

Buffalo Bill was not one to let anything escape his notice in such emergencies. He realized that, unassisted and bound as they were, the men suspected that he was entirely alone, and intended to throw themselves upon him in a desperate effort to bear him downward, prevent the use of his revolvers, and to escape.

One, two, might be killed, but the scout could do no more with the whole crowd upon him.

Glancing upward, he called out:

"Ho, Jack! I will follow the cliff down to the valley. You and several more of the men do the same, to keep your eyes on these fellows, should they give me trouble. Send others of the men down the lasso, and let them bury these bodies."

Without waiting for reply, Buffalo Bill, speaking to the leader, continued:

"Now lead the way, keeping close along this cliff, to where the horses are."

The critical moment had passed, the coolness and command of the scout had cowed the ruffians, and they saw that resistance was in vain.

The men, linked by the lariat, followed in close order.

With a vicious sullenness the cavalcade moved off along the base of the cliff.

Buffalo Bill followed, and did not even have a revolver drawn.

They soon came to a bit of meadow where there was a break in the wall of rocks.

Through this dashed a stream, and along the rugged bank a trail led to the cliff above.

In the meadow, staked out, with saddles on, but bridles hung upon the horn, were eleven horses, all fine animals, the scout saw, with admiring glance, and halting the prisoners close under the cliff, he went himself and brought up the horses. Then each man was carefully retied with the stake-ropes, and the lariat removed, so that they could mount. One by one they were made to do this, and were then secured by the same stake-rope to their saddles.

When all were thus mounted and secured, the lariat was run through the bit of each bridle, so that, when the horses filed off, the head of one just touched the haunches of the animal preceding.

At last, mounting one of the extra horses and taking the two extra ones in lead, the scout led the way up the rugged bank to the plateau above.

A ride of half a mile brought him out of some timber upon the plateau, and there, to the utter amazement and bitter chagrin of the prisoners, they beheld a superb horse standing a few paces back from the edge of the cliff, while to his saddle horn was attached a lariat, the other end of which fell over the precipice out of sight.

There stood the noble and faithful animal, as his master had left him, holding the lariat as he had been left to do, while at the edge of the cliff, to keep the line from cutting on the rock, was a tin plate, so bent as to hold there.

The scout smiled as he saw the chagrin and anger depicted on the faces of his prisoners.

They eagerly looked up and down the cliff, but not a man was in sight; the fringe of bushes along the edge had concealed no one!

The scout had boldly and cleverly done his daring work without aid or comrade.

He had accomplished what no other man would have dared to attempt!

It looked like madness for one man to attempt the capture of nine desperadoes, but his complete triumph had shown that there was method in his madness.

He had been watching them from above, while they signed that fatal Death Roll; he had laid his plan of action, had

bent the tin plate to fit the sharp edge of the rock, had placed his well-trained horse facing the cliff to hold the strain on the lariat; then he had cast the deadly noose over the head of the leader, just in time to save him from his own band.

With giant strength, he had dragged the man upward, taken a turn around his saddle horn, and thus held the struggling form, while, with revolvers ready he had sprung to the cliff's rim, and cowed the men below, enforcing his command for non-resistance by a shot that ushered one soul into eternity.

The prisoners saw it all now at a glance.

They looked at each other, then at the scout, and, as one man, gave vent to their rage in one savage yell.

What that cry meant Buffalo Bill knew but too well; and, revolvers drawn, he drove the spurs deep into the flanks of the horse he rode, just in time to save being swept off over the cliff's brink by the converging line of horsemen, who, at their leader's sign, moved around him in a curve.

CHAPTER V.

A DESPERATE RESOLVE.

Buffalo Bill had seen his danger at the moment he realized their intention, and instantly sinking the spurs into the horse he bestrode, his revolvers drawn, he escaped being caught in the swoop, and bounded cleverly by the last of the gathering line.

It was a narrow escape from a real death trap.

Passing the last man, the scout instantly halted and covered the men with his revolvers, amid their howls of disappointment and fury.

But, these howls turned quickly to exclamations and cries of horror as the further one of the horsemen at the end of the closing line in the rush toppled over the cliff, and horse and rider went to their doom—the man uttering an appalling cry.

The other horses shrunk backward just in time to save themselves from being pulled over, and their weight was thrown against that of the animal which had gone over, and thus held by the lariat around his neck, hung suspended several feet below the edge of the cliff, struggling wildly.

There, too, tied to his saddle, hung his rider, shrieking for aid, his face death-like in its pallor, his eyes wildly staring in entreaty to be saved.

Buffalo Bill had instantly realized what had happened, and quickly seizing the lariat hanging over the cliff, and attached to his own horse, standing a few paces away, he rushed the animal to near the edge, gave a whirl of the coil, and caught the struggling, swaying brute about the body.

The scout dreaded lest the other lariat should soon give way, and thus he gave a double hold upon the swinging horse by this timely act.

Another lariat, taken from one of the outlaws' saddles, was cast over the head of the wildly struggling horse, and made fast to the horn of the nearest saddle, while a shot from the scout's revolver sent a bullet through the brain of the brute that was choking to death, thus ending his dying frenzy and making the strain less severe upon the lines now holding him.

And securely was the outlaw bound in the saddle of the now dead horse, and swinging between life and death, crying for help.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CRIME OF INGRATITUDE.

From the moment the end horse and his bound rider had gone over the cliff, to the time that Buffalo Bill had cast two separate lassoes to break the strain upon the one, and had shot the horse, to further lessen the tax upon the lines, had not consumed more than a minute.

Going, then, to his own horse, the scout had patted him affectionately and said:

"Stand firm, old pard, because my life depends upon you!"

Then he took up the bent tin plate, forced it beneath the lariat over the edge of the rock, and swung himself over upon the taut cord.

The eye of every outlaw was upon him. Especially was the gaze of the man bound to his saddle fastened upon him with appealing regard.

The outlaws could do nothing, bound as they were, and if their now nervous horses grew more restive all might be dragged over, they well knew, to death.

"I will aid you, for you did not bind me in my saddle."

It was Bob Brass who spoke, and he slipped out of his saddle as he spoke.

Instantly Buffalo Bill drew himself back upon the cliff, and, revolver in hand, he advanced upon the man.

"I had forgotten you, and I'll send a bullet into your heart if you dare move," he said, sternly.

"But, I wish to help you save that man, for such appears to be your intention!"

"It is, as surely as it is my intention to kill you to save myself. You have a telltale face, Bob Brass, and twice I have read your purpose."

"You would have cut the lines and had me go down with that horse and man; or, failing in that, you would have forced the whole line of horses over to save yourself, for, though in irons, as you are, you are capable of doing much deviltry."

"Here, hold out your hands, for I have no time to lose."

The man sprang backward, as though to run, but with a bound Buffalo Bill was after him, and hurling him to the ground with no gentle force, he tore off the silk scarf he wore, bound it quickly about his legs, and forcing his hands downward, made the manacles fast about the feet, thus preventing him from moving.

This had taken a couple of minutes of time, and the outlaws were trying hard to soothe their horses, growing more and more restive.

With a word to the animals to soothe them, Buffalo Bill approached the edge of the cliff, and once more swung himself over, placing his feet upon the head of the now dead horse.

The scout was taking desperate chances, risking his life to save that of the outlaw, for, bound as he was, the unfortunate man could do nothing to save himself, but swung from his saddle the very picture of despair and horror.

The men watched the brave scout with real admiration at his great pluck and humane nature.

If he had not cared to save a life, he could have cut the lines with his bowie and allowed horse and man to go down together.

But, slipping down until he reached the saddle horn, Buffalo Bill took his knife and began to cut the thongs that held the man to his horse, saying as he did so:

"Catch a firm grip upon my belt, and thus hold on. Have you the strength and nerve to do so?"

"Yes, oh, yes! I can do it," answered the man, who, now that help was at hand, had regained his nerve.

"Now, I will free your hands, but for fear you may fall, I will make these reins fast about you and around my waist."

He cut off the bridle reins as he spoke, and suited the action to the words, and so, if one fell, the other must go, also.

"Now, climb upward as I do."

"I will."

The eyes of the outlaws were upon the brave rescuer and their rescued comrade. Their horses were quivering with fear and scare, but safety seemed just at hand.

The scout's foot rested upon the head of the dead horse, and then he swung over upon his own lariat, held by his own splendid animal, that stood firm as

had loosened it from about the body of the swinging horse, thus leaving but two cords holding the heavy weight of the animal and two men.

Swinging upon his own lariat now, he relieved the others of his weight, and said to the outlaw:

"Now, climb up quickly to the cliff, for the rocks are wearing the rope, I see."

The man obeyed by placing his feet upon the head of the horse and coming up level with Buffalo Bill.

The latter was just about to release the reins which held the man to him when, suddenly, the outlaw, putting out one hand as though to get a grasp upon the line above, snatched the revolver from the scout's belt, and, quick as lightning, thrusting the muzzle hard against the body of his rescuer, pulled the trigger.

CHAPTER VII.

A STAMPEDE.

It was a close call, yet a miss is as good as a mile, it is said.

Never, however, had Buffalo Bill experienced a closer call in all of his adventurous life.

It was just in this way:

Buffalo Bill had self-cocking revolvers, and when the outlaw drew the weapon from the belt of his daring rescuer, to commit the basest of crimes, that of deadly ingratitude, he thrust the revolver muzzle hard against the body of the scout.

Had the weapon exploded the bullet would have torn through the heart of Buffalo Bill, and the hero's career would then and there have ended; but as the fellow rose at the pull of the trigger, the end of the bridle rein around the body of the scout, went beneath the trigger, and the blow fell, not upon the cap, but upon the leather.

The result was no explosion; the great scout was not doomed to thus die.

But he had realized his danger when too late to avoid it, though a man of iron nerve, quick action and presence of mind, he had prevented a second pull on that fatal trigger.

The outlaw was unnerved by his failure, and expecting instant death, he had let go his hold upon the rope with one hand and the revolver with the other. As he did this he received a stunning blow in the face from Buffalo Bill's fist.

But for the leather reins that bound him to Buffalo Bill, the ruffian would have gone down to his death. Instead, he swung there in mid-air, and the sudden weight was a hard strain upon Buffalo Bill.

Held by the leather under the hammer the revolver never fell, so it was quickly released and returned to its holder, by the scout.

Startled more by the movement of the men, there horses grew yet more nervous, and for a moment Buffalo Bill feared that all were coming over the cliff on top of him.

With a mighty exertion of strength he drew himself upward, reached the edge of the cliff and gained a footing there.

The outlaw, half stunned, half dazed, by fright, he quickly dragged after him.

A sweep of his knife severed the leather rein which bound the outlaw to him, and, as the horses were growing nearly wild now, in their nervousness, all except his own superb animal that yet stood firm as a rock, he leant over and cut the two lariats supporting the swinging brute.

His own, lariat, as has been said, was already free.

Backward staggered the line of linked horses, relieved of the weight, while, with a loud thud and crash, the dead beast struck the rocks below.

Springing to his feet, Buffalo Bill seized the outlaw and dragged him to where Bob Brass lay, quickly bound him again with the leather reins.

he ran to his faithful animal, threw himself into his saddle and darted away in pursuit.

It was just as they were about to dash wildly down the rugged trail through the pass, with the plunging river upon one side of them, that he came up with the leading horse, grasped his rein and turned him aside from this new danger.

A cheer from the outlaws told how they appreciated their rescue, for, utterly powerless to check their horses, they one and all knew that certain death awaited them, should one of their frightened, half maddened brutes stumble in that mad flight down the rough trail.

"It seems we are doomed to keep company, men," observed Buffalo Bill, as he brought the line of horses down to a walk and led them back toward the cliff.

"Buffalo Bill, I always heard you was kin to the devil, and now I know it," said one of the men with real admiration for the scout.

"Thanks for the compliment," was the quiet answer, and soon after Buffalo Bill halted the horses near where lay Bob Brass and the outlaw who had tried to show his gratitude for the scout's saving his life by killing the man who had risked his own to do so.

He had returned to perfect consciousness now, but had a bruise on his face where the scout had driven his fist.

"Pards, I thought if I kilt him I'd save all of yer," he said in a tone of apology as the outlaws were led up by Buffalo Bill.

The latter laughed and said:

"Fool, didn't you know that my weight would have pulled you off the rope, too, for you had the revolver in one hand?"

"Lordy! I never thought of that. It was a mighty narrow escape for me, I tell you, pards."

"And for me," dryly rejoined the scout.

Then he added:

"Bob Brass, I'll have you and that fellow mount now, and I'll see that you are all secure this time."

"Then I shall go over the cliff and get those bodies there, for they go with us, as I have never yet left a human being to be food for coyotes, if I could possibly avoid doing so."

"Let them alone, for they are nothing now," rudely answered Bob Brass.

"They are dead, hence sacred at least in my eyes," was the stern response.

CHAPTER VIII.

A NEW DANGER.

Having made the two outlaws mount on horses, as both of them were of light weight, Buffalo Bill bound them securely beyond all chance of escape, and then led the three animals that had been ridden by the dead men up close to the cliff.

He fastened the batch of animals so they could not be started off by their bound riders, and then placing his own horse in position, went over the edge of the cliff on his lariat, as he had done before.

Taking the nearest body, he tied the end of his long lariat about it, and then climbed up to the top and over the cliff.

As a separate trip would have to be made in each case, it would be a long and tedious task, to bring up the dead bodies.

Still he would not, as he had said, leave a human being to become a feast for coyotes and vultures.

A second time he went down to the scene of the triple tragedy, and two of the bodies were thus drawn upon the cliff.

A third trip Buffalo Bill prepared to make, but he hesitated on the edge, glanced at the outlaws sharply, as if suspecting some new attempt by them in his absence, if only to frighten his horse.

"You, and your gang, Bob Brass, are as hard a lot of villains as I ever saw; but I wish to say that if I hear a word or a chirp from any of you, I will come back and force into the mouth of each one of you a gag that will effectually silence the whole gang."

"I do not wish to be cruel, but patience ceases to be a virtue after awhile, and if a gag does not silence you a bullet will."

With this the scout slid over the cliff to get the third body.

Among the outlaws was the silence of death; not one of them dared speak, even in whispers.

Down the lariat went Buffalo Bill, and taking the last of the dead men, he secured the body to the end of his lariat, as had been the others.

Then he turned to reclimb the slender line to the cliff edge, forty-odd feet above.

In going up he had faced the wall of rock, aiding himself by rests here and there upon uneven places, by his feet.

This he found necessary in his last climb particularly, as his hands were now almost blistered, and even his iron-enduring frame could feel fatigue.

He had gone about a third of the distance, and had just taken his foot from a resting place, to resume his climbing, when there came to his ears from below the startling words:

"Yes, you are Buffalo Bill, and are on my trail; but now I have you where I want you!"

That Buffalo Bill was both surprised and startled may be assumed.

He glanced upward, expecting to see a face peering over the cliff at him. His second glance was downward. That glance revealed all.

A man stood below whom he recognized as his deadly foe, and this foe was covering him with a revolver, as he hung there in midair.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DESERTER.

Swinging in the air over thirty feet from the ground, clinging to the slender lariat, with a foe standing below with a drawn revolver, the scout was certainly in the direst danger, from which there seemed no escape.

Had the nerve of the great plainsman failed him for an instant, he would have lost his life; but it did not fail.

In moments of great danger brave men think with wonderful rapidity, and act with promptness—just as Buffalo Bill did.

The glance at the man showed him to be the very one for whom he was then on the search.

He was a soldier, wore a corporal's stripes upon his arm, and was booted and spurred, being a cavalryman. A carbine swung at his back, a saber hung at his left side, and his belt held two revolvers, while a third was grasped in his hand and covered the scout.

The man's face was haggard, his beard was of a week's growth, and he looked like one who was suffering and desperate.

A week before he had killed a sergeant in his troop, and in making his escape had also shot down the sentinel over the corral where he went for his horse.

The whole force at the fort had been turned out in pursuit; but the corporal was an expert frontiersman, and both clever and cunning, so had eluded all pursuers.

The chase was kept up for several days, and then given up until Buffalo Bill rode into the fort, and the commandant had put him upon the track of the fugitive soldier.

It had been no easy work to pick up a cold trail, but the scout had done so, and was following it when his attention had been attracted by the sight of the men gathering at the cliff, evidently for some evil purpose.

Watching them from above, he had seen and heard just what their intention

was, and, as has been seen, made the bold play to capture the outfit alone and single-handed.

No one knew better than he the almost desperate chances against him; but he was one whose courage impelled him to all risks.

The hard task the brave scout set himself to accomplish has been recorded, and just when success had crowned his efforts suddenly another danger threatened, and one from which there appeared to be no escape.

But, his nerve was not undone, and he looked squarely down into the face of the soldier deserter, who, knowing that he was upon his track, or surmising as much, would naturally wish to kill him, as he then held him to all appearances, at his mercy.

"Ho, Corporal Dave Strong! What in the world are you doing this far from the fort?" he called back, in the coolest of tones.

The corporal stared. Could it be that Buffalo Bill, who was off from the fort on a scout when he fled, had really not returned, so did not know of what had happened, and so was really not on his trail, was the thought that flashed through his mind.

"Why, I went off on a hunt and got lost, and I'm awful glad to meet you, Chief Cody," he answered, lowering his weapon.

"So you thought you'd scare me, eh? Well, you did scare me, I admit, for I am not in best fighting trim up here."

"I'll come down, for you see that dead man there, and there are more to tell you about, corporal, and mighty glad I am of your aid."

"Who is with you?" asked the corporal, suspiciously, while Buffalo Bill began to come down the lariat, hand under hand.

"More of the same kind," and as Buffalo Bill reached the ground he held out his hand to the corporal.

The latter grasped it, but asked again:

"Who is with you?"

"Eight live men and three dead ones, counting this man, and they are a hard lot from the Red Willow Mines."

"Ain't you afraid of them?"

"I've got them all tied to their horses, for I caught them napping."

"When did you leave the fort, and how was it you got lost?"

"I was just about to ask when you left?"

"I went off on a scout two weeks ago."

This the corporal knew, but he did not know the scout had, meanwhile, returned and started off on his trail, so cleverly had he been misled.

Corporal Dave Strong was never a popular man at the fort, though an excellent soldier. He had been a scout before enlisting, and also a miner, and through all was an arrant gambler.

A man of hirculean strength, a fine shot, superb hand with the sword, he was feared by his comrades and heartily disliked for his overbearing manner and high temper.

It was over a game of cards he had killed his sergeant, and when he had made his escape all knew that a very dangerous man was free, to work much harm, if he remained in that country and turned outlaw.

But, the corporal owed his life on more than one occasion to Buffalo Bill, and now, believing that the scout did not know his double crime and flight, he was anxious to give him the slip without killing him, when the opportunity offered for him to do so.

CHAPTER X.

PLOT AND COUNTERPLOT.

Buffalo Bill had played his card boldly and well, and must so play it to further his instant decision to capture the renegade, as his orders instructed—dead or alive.

But as he did not wish the man's life on his hands, he at once determined to use strategy and gain the corporal's confidence.

"I wish to tell you of my capture, corporal, and, though I say so myself, I know you will think I have done well," he began his recital.

"I am out on a trail, as you know, and I camped back in the timber beyond this cliff for dinner, when, hearing a horse neigh in this direction, I came on foot to reconnoitre."

"I looked over the cliff and saw a man seated here, recognizing him as Bob Brass of one of the lower mining camps, and a gambler, though he had once been an Overland stage driver."

"I knew from his actions that he had come to keep an appointment, so I just determined to find out what it was all about."

"And you did so?"

"Oh, yes," and Buffalo Bill told the whole story as it had happened, adding:

"Now, you can just understand how your joke to scare me made me feel for a minute or two; but I'm mighty glad I found you, for you can help me greatly, as I will take my prisoner to camp to-night a dozen miles from here, and push on to-morrow to the fort; but how did you manage to lose yourself, corporal?"

"I was detailed to accompany Captain Langley on a hunt, and you know what he is after is game."

"Yes, he is bound to have game if there is any to be found."

"Well, I got in chase of some deer, and lost my way."

"My horse went lame from a stone getting hung in his shoe, and I have not been able to get it out, so here I am."

"Have you seen any cavalry, Chief Cody?"

"None."

"I guess the captain gave me up and returned to the fort, leaving me to follow, but I hope you have a good supply of rations, for I am about starved."

"I have plenty, but where is your horse?"

"A mile from here."

"I heard firing, so came to see what it meant, and who it was, thinking it must be Captain Langley's party."

"No, I did the firing, I guess. But come, we'll go up on the cliff, draw up this body after us, and we can then ride over to get your horse, for I have my tools along and can soon get the stone out of the hoof of your horse, and then he'll be all right."

"I guess I had better walk back and lead him to your camp."

"No, that will take too long."

"Then, too, you really look used up and must have something to eat right away."

The corporal had intended to give the scout the slip right then.

But it flashed upon him that with nothing to eat and a lame horse he must still be in a very bad way.

The words of Buffalo Bill decided him upon taking advantage of his lucky meeting with him.

He seemed to feel that luck was coming his way, and he would play his cards well.

Believing Buffalo Bill wholly ignorant of his crime and escape, he would simply go up on the cliff with him, get something to eat, for the little food he had been able to bring with him had given out the day before, and go after his horse.

With the stone taken from where it had become fastened in the shoe his horse would be all right, though the corporal recalled that Buffalo Bill had the finest animals on the frontier for speed and endurance, barring none.

He could better himself surely by going with the scout to his camp, for unsuspected as he believed he was, he could plan to have all go as he wished it.

This decided upon, the scout took hold of the lariat and again went up to the top of the cliff.

Then he called down:

"Now, corporal, you come up and we will then haul the body up."

These words sent a shudder to the hearts of Bob Brass and his comrades.

They had heard voices below, knew the scout had found some one, but when he called the word "corporal," they supposed there must be a party of soldiers there, and all hope of escaping from the scout, before he could take them to the fort, faded utterly away.

Weakened as he was, it was no easy task for the fugitive soldier to climb the lariat, but Buffalo Bill gave him a helping hand, when at the top, and he was drawn upon the cliff in safety.

CHAPTER XI.

BUFFALO BILL IN DANGER.

The two men having arrived safely on the cliff, while Corporal Dave Strong turned his eyes upon the outlaw prisoners, the scout began to draw up the body of the last of the three dead.

As the corporal saw the men, he knew just who and what they were.

In his career upon the border as stage driver, miner, scout and soldier, Dave Strong had become acquainted with many hard and strange characters.

He knew half of the men who were now the prisoners of Buffalo Bill.

Knowing them, he was well aware that they were ready for any mischief, that they would commit crime without the slightest dread of remorse.

He could pick out some of the party whom he knew had done deeds that would have hanged them if the law's talons could have fallen upon them.

They did not know him as a murderer and a fugitive deserter.

They recognized him as one against whom no criminal charge had ever been made, and who, as a soldier, would only aid Buffalo Bill in keeping them from making their escape.

Had they known the red record he had won in the last few days, how gladly would they have hailed his coming.

Just what the corporal was doing there, unshaven and looking haggard and seedy, they could not guess.

The corporal looked them over, and said sternly, with an air of supreme disgust, too, at their wickedness:

"A nice pickle this you have gotten yourselves into, men."

"Maybe yes, and maybe no, corporal," said Bob Brass, not knowing the soldier, but recognizing his rank by his stripes.

"We will leave them here until we return, for they will be safe," said Buffalo Bill, who leaped into his own saddle and told the soldier to take the animal that was to be kept for the last of the dead bodies drawn up on the cliff.

The soldier obeyed and followed the scout in the direction he had said. he left his horse.

Riding down the rugged trail and crossing the stream, they found the animal, a large bay, staked out upon a little meadow of delicious grass.

The saddle and bridle lay in some willows near, and there was a smouldering fire, a tin cup, canteen, and a couple of blankets.

With the tools he always carried with him, Buffalo Bill quickly freed the horse from the stone in his hoof, and was glad to see that it had left no lameness.

Taking the horse in lead, they started back for the cliff, and found the outlaws just as they had been left.

It was growing late in the afternoon now, and Buffalo Bill was anxious to find a camping place before dark.

He had been fortunate thus far beyond his most ardent expectations, for he had captured the outlaws, and if the corporal was not yet a prisoner, he at least had him within reach.

The bodies were therefore strapped upon the horses, and leaving the animals bearing them to be led by the corporal, Buffalo Bill took those bearing his prisoners in lead, and started upon his way.

"How far are you going to-night, Chief Cody?" asked the corporal, not caring to go on the back trail toward the fort, for fear of meeting a scouting party of soldiers.

"I know of a good and safe camp half a dozen miles from here we can reach before sunset, corporal, and it is well to be well located, as were we to meet a party of prowling miners, they might attempt a rescue of our prisoners, while Indians are also on the scene in small bands in this country."

"Yes, that's so," said the corporal, and he rode on in silence.

But his mind was painfully busy.

He could have shot Buffalo Bill in the back at any moment, and ended all suspense.

But that the scout seemed to feel he would not do, and trusted him.

The prisoners had all left their camps with only a day or two's rations, not expecting to be long away, and Red Willow settlement was all of forty miles from where they then were.

In another direction, nearly a hundred miles away, lay the fort, and in still another direction was a line of mining camps, located along the Overland stage trail, the nearest being fifty miles off.

To the northward was the Indian country, and a band of braves were liable to be met at any time.

Thinking matters over, the fugitive soldier, as he rode along, leading the horses bearing their ghastly burden, decided what the best course would be for him to pursue.

Arriving in camp, he would get a chance to talk with Bob Brass and one or two of the prisoners whom he knew, for his doing so, he thought, would certainly attract no suspicion upon him, as the scout did not, in his opinion, know he was a fugitive.

Then he would plan to set the prisoners free, Buffalo Bill would be made a prisoner, and then allowed to go his way to the fort on foot.

He did not wish to kill the scout unless they were forced to do so by his desperate resistance.

"Yes, all works my way, and to-night will tell the story," he said, as Buffalo Bill led the way to the halting place for the night.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SOLDIER'S PLOT.

The responsibility resting upon him Buffalo Bill fully realized as he rode into the little clump of timber he had decided upon as his camp for the night.

He not only had his eight prisoners to look after, but the dead men to be unstrapped from the horses and placed apart, while he had the soldier fugitive to yet capture, as it were.

But he seemed not in the least uneasy, and led each horse to the spot where he intended to stake him out, in a meadow a few rods distant from the camp.

This was in a bend formed by a creek, deep and running swiftly, so that the one place to be guarded would be the entrance end of the little point.

"I will sleep at this end, leaving you among the prisoners, corporal," said Buffalo Bill.

"I am under your orders, sir," was the answer, but Buffalo Bill knew that he had done just what the soldier wanted.

At the same time he had pleased himself.

The horses placed, the corporal was set to work building a fire and preparing supper for all, while one by one the scout untied the prisoners from their saddles, and leading them into the timber, made them secure there.

It, of course, took some little time for each man, and purposely Buffalo Bill took Bob Brass first from his horse to the camp.

It was just as he had felt that it would be, for Corporal Strong at once found wood more plentiful near where the outlaw leader had been placed.

Buffalo Bill of course could not hear what passed between them, but he kept his eyes busy, and saw that the corporal hung near the prisoner until he came near with two others, for he decided to hasten his movements as much as possible.

"You are in a bad way, pard," said

Corporal Strong, as he picked up wood near Bob Brass.

"I should think so," was the reply.

"Buffalo Bill is sure to get you to the fort."

"Perhaps."

"What do you mean?"

"I never give up hope while there is a chance for life."

"Do you see any?"

"Your pay as a corporal is not over a couple of hundred a year?"

"No."

"Well, we are all human, and if I were to give you a dozen times that sum in a lump, what would you say?"

"For your freedom only?"

"I am trading now for all."

"I will set you free for the sum you name, and leave it for you to get the others to match it if they wish to save their necks."

"They'll do it, for I'll answer for it."

"All right, I'll take the contract."

"How can you do it?"

"I know a way."

"You have got the very devil to master in Buffalo Bill."

"I know that very well."

"Here he comes now."

"I will return this way when he goes back after other prisoners," and the soldier moved away with his arms full of wood.

He had already lighted his fire, and had put the provisions out for use, and as soon as Buffalo Bill went back for other prisoners he returned to where the outlaw leader and two of his men were.

"These men agree, and all will, so give us your plan while you can do so," said Bob Brass hastily.

"There is no hurry, and I have another plan to propose."

"Name it."

"If I set you free I dare not go back to the fort."

"If it is known, no."

"Very well, that makes an outcast of me."

"Join us."

"For what work?"

"Robbing lone gold camps, holding up coaches, Pony Riders, and wagon trains."

"A good business, but I serve under no man, and I'll tell you now I do not want your money, but will set you and your whole outfit free on one condition."

"What is that?"

"That you serve me."

"In that way?"

"I have decided to turn road-agent myself, under certain conditions, and I will take you as my lieutenant and your men as my band, enlarging it by a few more enlistments, and if you agree to this I will set you free."

"If not?"

"Money can't buy your escape. I tell you that flatly."

"But I am only a lieutenant now, a sub-officer of the band."

"Who is the chief?"

"He will appear in good time when needed."

"And you only serve under him?"

"Yes."

"Well, I want you to serve me, for I will be your captain, and I can make money for all of us."

"But the chief will not submit."

"All right, he'll be a chief without a band."

"How so?"

"You will all hang."

"But we will pay you big money for our pardon."

"I am trading on one condition."

"That we serve you and desert our chief?"

"Yes; for you are now in a position where your chief cannot serve you, and he is a chief without any followers."

"This is a new deal, made as it were with dead men, for every mother's son of you will hang as you know."

"Buffalo Bill is coming back."

"Return when he goes after more men," and again Dave Strong, the deserter, walked back to the fire.

CHAPTER XIII.
UNDERHAND WORK.

Once more the scout approached with two of the men, and he seemed to be perfectly unconscious of anything going on against him in the way of a plot.

Completely fooled by Buffalo Bill's pretended innocence of his crime the corporal felt perfectly at his ease, and was working about the camp fire when Buffalo Bill returned that way.

"I've been keeping my eye on those fellows, chief, for I didn't know whether you were making them all secure until you brought the balance up."

"That is right, corporal, for it is no easy task I have on my hands."

"I should say not, in fact call on me whenever I can serve you."

"I will."

The scout walked back after the other prisoners, and after putting more wood on the fire the corporal gathered the canteens and went to the stream for water.

But he found it convenient to get water near the prisoners, who were securely bound now hand and foot and seated upon the ground in a row between two trees, the scout intending to run a lariat along and through the hands of each one, thus preventing any of them from leaving the spot.

Stepping upon the rock nearest the leader the corporal dipped a canteen into the stream to fill it and said:

"Well, there are five of you here now, so what is the verdict?"

"Your demand is that you be chief of the band?"

"Yes."

"Which it is to duty as road-agents, as I was intended by the unknown chief whose officer I am."

"It shall do duty as I deem best for my own and the interests of each member."

"For lawless deeds."

"Certainly, for I know you are all outlaws, each one of you has committed crimes that would hang you and if I unite your destiny with mine, I accept the consequences, and live or die with you."

"That sounds well."

"I am no coward," and Dave Strong filled a third canteen, continuing as he laid it on the bank and took up a fourth one:

"I know this country as no man, save Buffalo Bill does. I have been stage driver, gold miner and scout, ending with soldier, which I now am, and the latter has fitted me to command men."

"I could take your money and deceive you, but I want none save that I earn, and together we can get rich."

"I ask, to save you all from the gallows, the right to be your chief, put my neck in the noose with yours."

"Do you refuse or do you accept my terms?"

"You talk square, and when the others are brought here and Buffalo Bill is not near, we will all talk it over and decide," said Bob Brass.

"Do so."

"But how are you to save us?"

"I'll find a means, never fear."

"Our band is known as the League of Mounted Gold Miners."

"A good name."

"We have all signed a Death Roll, all save two, and I killed both of them, for we cannot trust our secret to those who are not of our band."

"You are right."

"Do you dare sign that Death Roll?"

"Where is it?"

"Here in my pocket, along with a pen and red ink."

"Get them out, and sign it if you dare."

"All right."

"Bring the Death Roll to me, signed with your name and army rank and regiment, and you shall have an answer."

The corporal swung the canteens about his shoulders, thrust his hand into the pocket of the outlaw and drew out the Death Roll and the pen and ink.

Then he walked back to the fire and set diligently to work to prepare supper, while Buffalo Bill took two more of the gang to the camp, tied them securely and returned for the last two.

The corporal showed that among his accomplishments he possessed the art of knowing how to cook, for he sliced some bacon thin, cut some steaks from a haunch of venison the outlaws had with them, filled Buffalo Bill's coffee pot, and several of the tin cups with water to boil, and made up some dough for bread, while potatoes were put in the fire to roast, and onions sliced to add zest to the appetite.

Buffalo Bill always scouted with a well supplied provision bag, and to get supper for half a score hungry men the corporal was drawing most liberally upon it.

In spite of his being busy at cooking, the corporal found time to return to the prisoners for a moment when the scout had placed all of them in line and run the lariat from tree to tree, passing it between the bonds above their ankles.

He asked the scout to look after the boiling coffee while he went for more water.

"Well, here is your Death Roll, and I have signed it."

"Now for your answer," he said.

"We agree to your terms."

"You are wise."

"Now, how will you set us free?"

"There is but one way it can be done."

"How is that?"

"To kill Buffalo Bill."

CHAPTER XIV.

IN DEADLIEST PERIL.

Back to the camp fire went the soldier, and found the man whom he had just said must die quietly cooking supper.

"The men are anxious for their supper, chief, so I will serve them now, as soon as you have helped yourself."

"You are the hungry one, corporal, so eat your supper and I will look after the prisoners."

"Oh, no, I've been nibbling as I cooked, so am all right."

"I will help you, then, and we will have our meal afterward."

The corporal did not wish to argue the point.

With a knowledge of what his intentions were, he was suspicious that the scout might suspect, and so he said:

"All right, sir."

"But could we not bring the men here in a body, and I keep them under cover of my carbine while they ate?"

"No, for I will take no chances."

"They would be wholly at our mercy."

"Perhaps."

"But with hands and feet untied, if they wished, though unarmed, they could give us a great deal of trouble, in fact would do so."

"No, we can carry them their supper, and they must excuse any shortcomings."

"All right, sir, I'll get the grub ready; but we might bring the leader and several of them here."

"No, for I know Bob Brass too well to take chances, corporal."

"Who is he, sir?"

"I'll tell you what I know of him, and it is enough to hang him."

"I don't doubt it."

"A man came out to Red Willow Settlement, a handsome fellow and one who called himself a prospector."

"He found gold, lived in a comfortable cabin alone, and worked his find for all it was worth, and it was said that he got a great deal of gold."

"But one night he disappeared, his cabin was locked, and all thought he had been murdered."

"A month or two after the stage brought a stranger to the mines, and he had papers giving him full right, title, and all else to Rex Ridgeley's claim, for that was the handsome prospector's name."

"This newcomer said that Ridgeley had gone east, and was rich, and had sold out his claim to him, and he had, as I said, the papers to prove it."

"He took possession of the cabin and the mine, and was known as Bob Brass, and from the day of his coming he has been known as a very dangerous man, though he called himself a tenderfoot."

"He has killed half a dozen men, one of them a soldier who was gambling with him, and a stranger arrived one day in search of him."

"He was shown the cabin of Bob Brass, and soon after shots were heard."

"The stranger was killed, and he was afterward found out to have been an officer of the law, who wanted him east for crimes committed there."

"Bob Brass soon after learned that news had been sent to the fort as to who and what he was, and he at once proclaimed himself a hunted man, and dared any one to earn the price upon his head."

"No one has gotten it up to date, but I am very sure that if I get him to the fort his career of crime will close, as will also be the case of the others whom he has picked for lawless work, and organized into a band which fortunately have not yet been able to begin their red record as outlaws."

"Now you know him, and his followers are not much better, so you see, Corporal Strong, it is most important that we get them in safety to the fort."

"Yes, I see," responded the corporal, and then he aided Buffalo Bill to carry the supper to the prisoners.

Buffalo Bill had told the story of the career of Bob Brass to note its effect upon the fugitive soldier.

He had already formed the idea that the fugitive corporal did not intend to leave the country.

Moneyless, as he was, a double murderer, knowing no other country, and a fugitive, he would naturally do as others had before him, become an outcast.

The scout realized that by a rescue of Bob Brass and his seven men he would gain their lifelong gratitude, and his rank as a corporal would give him a hold upon them as a leader.

Buffalo Bill appeared to read just what the plan of the fugitive soldier would be, a rescue of the prisoners and to join their band.

To do this he knew that he must be sacrificed.

Somehow he would not believe that the corporal would be the one to kill him, owing him his life, as he did, and so he was anxious to keep his eyes upon the prisoners.

The corporal had last gone to them, and it would have been easy to have severed the bonds of several with his knife, for Bob Brass had manacles upon his wrists and ankles as well.

So Buffalo Bill was anxious to go and face the ordeal at once, hence he aided in carrying the supper to the outlaws.

He could just see, by the fading light, that they were as he had left them, and he breathed more freely.

Then he built a small fire near, for them to see to eat their supper, he said, but in reality to be able to discover every movement made.

When they had been given their supper, and he served them faithfully, he returned with the corporal to the large fire to eat their meal.

"Now, the corporal will kill him, unless he is playing us false," said Bob Brass to his men.

CHAPTER XV.

RESOLVED.

The little fire built by the scout revealed to him that the bonds of his prisoners were intact, and he felt more secure.

The corporal had not yet made any attempt to free them, though the scout felt sure that he had been arranging with them a plot to do so.

What that plot was Buffalo Bill did not know, but he was determined not to be caught napping.

To give an idea of security, he took off his belt of arms and laid them to one side, as he said, to eat his supper in comfort.

But he had already concealed a revolver in his breast pocket.

The corporal also threw off his heavy army belt, with its saber, revolver, and cartridge box.

Together the two men sat eating supper and chatting pleasantly, and then Buffalo Bill said:

"Corporal, I will scrape up the dishes and spread the blankets for the prisoners, if you will water the horses and stake them in a fresh grazing ground."

"All right, sir," and the corporal, with no dread of a counter plot by Buffalo Bill, walked off and left his belt of arms and carbine lying where he had placed them.

Most expert in the handling of weapons, and glad at a chance so foolishly given him, Buffalo Bill, without attracting the attention of the prisoners, very quickly took the cartridges from the corporal's carbine and revolver.

Then he scraped up the tin plates, washed them and the tin cups, rinsed out the coffee pot, and walked over to where the prisoners were.

"I am sorry you have to be uncomfortable, men, but it cannot be helped."

"I will spread your blankets for you, and give you one to cover with, and you must make the best of it, for you well know I dare not release you," he said in a kindly tone.

"Why not release our feet, at least, and keep watch half the night over us yourself, the corporal keeping guard the other half?"

"It would be more humane," said Bob Brass.

"Little humanity, do you deserve, Bob Brass, and as it is you will not be as uncomfortable as you might, if guarded by others."

"No, I will do for you all that I dare do."

"That's precious little."

"From your own standpoint, perhaps, but I have eight men to watch."

"You have the corporal to help you; but I'd rather trust to your mery than his."

"No doubt," and having spread the blankets for the men, Buffalo Bill was turning away when Bob Brass called out:

"Will you let the corporal bring us some water?"

"Oh, yes, you shall have all the water you want," and Buffalo Bill returned to the fire, got a couple of tin cups, and going to the stream, began to take water to the men.

It was evident that they were disappointed.

They had hoped that the corporal would do this kindness for them.

The scout was determined that he should not.

"Please have the corporal bring us our saddles to put our heads on," said Bob Brass.

"All right," called out the scout, but he brought them himself, and this was another bitter disappointment to the prisoners.

Upon returning to the campfire, Buffalo Bill saw the corporal just appearing from the direction of the meadow.

The corporal had been anxious to give the best of care to the horses, and he had watered each one and staked them out in fresh feeding places.

"You'll be my horse when the sun rises again," he muttered, as he patted the horse of Buffalo Bill and gazed at him admiringly.

When he returned to the fire he asked: "Are the prisoners all secure, Chief Cody?"

"Oh, yes, and I made them as comfortable as I could, poor fellows, for I always feel for one in misfortune."

"So it is said of you, sir," and the face of the fugitive soldier was a study.

There before him sat the man who had twice saved his life, and against whom he was plotting then in his heart.

He was planning to end his brilliant career as a borderman, and simply to save his own life, upon which he had so recently brought the stain of a double murder.

For a moment it seemed that the face of the corporal softened, and his eyes were lowered.

But only for an instant, for there came back to his countenance the same hard, cruel look it had worn before.

He knew that his own life would be the sacrifice if he did not kill Buffalo Bill.

He reasoned that if he spared Buffalo Bill, allowing him to return to the fort, in fact, he would lose his hold upon the band he now sought to become the leader of.

Then it flashed through his mind that Buffalo Bill alive would hunt him off the face of the earth.

The scout knew the country thoroughly, and once he set out to run down the Mounted Gold Miners he would do so.

Where they could elude others, Buffalo Bill they could not escape.

No, there was nothing for it but to kill Buffalo Bill.

"I must do it, though it is a coward deed," he muttered, as he leant back against a tree, with his face in the shadow.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE CALL TO DIE.

Buffalo Bill showed no indication in his face that he realized the workings of the deserter's brain.

He could hardly believe that the man he had served so well would really take his life, and felt that it was only his intention to free the prisoners and then let him go his way.

Still, with all his trust in human nature, he yet had protected himself to the extent of taking the cartridges from the weapons of the fugitive soldier, as he might from impulse do that which in calmer moments he would shrink from.

If driven to the wall to escape he might become dangerous.

As the two sat there, near the campfire, the scout was on the watch for any move of the soldier.

He had not yet determined just when he would make the arrest of the soldier.

Not caring to have more on his hands to look after than he already had for the night, he was anxious, if possible, to wait until the morning to make the arrest.

Still, he feared that the soldier would not allow him to wait, but force him to act sooner.

As they sat there in the light of the fire, the scout saw that the man kept his face hidden from him.

There was no doubt but that he was nerving himself to act, but just how or when Buffalo Bill could only conjecture.

As the soldier stretched out his hand and drew his belt of arms toward him the scout felt that the ordeal was upon him.

"I will have a look to see that the men are all safe, and then turn in," said the soldier.

"All right, corporal."

The corporal buckled his belt on and strolled away toward the prisoners.

Buffalo Bill had all their weapons near him, and his own trusty rifle was within reach, his belt of arms right at hand.

He knew that the corporal could not get the prisoners free before he reached the spot, not even undo the bands about the feet and hands of one of them.

If necessary, he could bring him down with a shot from his rifle, though this Buffalo Bill did not wish to do.

He had taken the precaution to throw more wood upon the fire he had built near the prisoners, so could see them distinctly.

Then, too, he could see every movement of the corporal, as he walked toward them.

The corporal, meanwhile, went up near to the line of prisoners, all of whom were now lying down, and said in a low tone to Bob Brass:

"See here, I don't wish to have to kill Buffalo Bill."

"Why not?"

"Well, he twice risked his life to save mine."

"And would now take you to the fort to be hanged, if he knew your intention."

"True, yet would do only his duty."

"Are you weakening?"

"Oh, no, only I cannot but feel the act I must do."

"What do you wish to do with the scout?"

"I should like to set him free, on foot, and while he was making his way to the fort we would have every chance to get to a place of safety, from which to begin our work."

"Have you forgotten that no man knows this country as does Buffalo Bill?"

"That is true."

"Have you forgotten that he would be a bloodhound upon our track, that his pride would force him to recapture the men he so cleverly took in alone, and then lost?"

"He would."

"Yes, and he would run us down, mark my words."

"With Buffalo Bill out of the way, we have nothing to fear from scouts or soldiers, miners or settlers."

"We can do as we please and strike often and hard where gold is to be had. But with Buffalo Bill alive and on our track, the Mounted Gold Miners would this country."

"You are right."

"Now what do you say to showing him mercy now?"

"He will have to die, as I have before soon be in their graves or driven from decided."

"But—"

"But what?"

"Let me set you free and you do the work."

"With pleasure."

"He knows that I came over here to see if you are all right."

"Yes."

"I will give you my revolver, though your hands are manacled the chain between gives you free use of them."

"It does."

"I will tell him that I believe you are getting your irons off of your feet."

"I understand."

"Then, when he comes to see you, that is your time to act."

"And I will."

"Make no mistake."

"Trust me for doing my work well; but if I kill the scout I should be your leader."

"No."

"I say yes, for it is little that you do for us."

"I will not do that little, then."

"You hold the trump cards, so I yield."

"You are wise."

"Give me your revolver and call the scout to his doom."

The weapon was handed to Bob Brass, and then the corporal called out:

"Oh, Chief Cody, come here, please, for I think you are wanted, as Bob Brass has nearly freed his feet."

Buffalo Bill sprung to his feet and approached the spot.

He knew that the ordeal was upon him.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DOUBLE ATTACK.

Buffalo Bill walked rapidly toward the scene where he believed there was to be a tragedy enacted.

He felt that the corporal, with the gallows looming up before him for his crimes, would not surrender at demand.

Though he had removed the cartridges from the corporal's weapons, he yet could not but realize that, bound though they were, they were nine men to one, and no help within half a hundred miles.

The soldier had called him to die, that was certain.

But what would the result be?

Had the soldier a weapon he knew not of.

Had he discovered the cartridges gone from his revolver and reloaded it?

These chances the scout must face.

And face them he did.

Boldly he walked up near to the soldier and asked:

"What is it, corporal?"

"Bob Brass has freed one of his feet from the manacles on his ankles, sir."

"Indeed!"

"I did not believe that possible."

"I will have a look at him."

As he stepped forward Buffalo Bill did so in a way that did not place the corporal at his back.

The men all lay quiet now, as though asleep, save the two next to Bob Brass.

These two were anxious and nervous.

They did not know but that there would be a shooting match, unless their leader killed the scout at the first shot.

As he got to within a step of the leader, he suddenly rose to a sitting posture, his hand was thrown forward, and he called out, savagely:

"Now you die, Buffalo Bill!"

The intention of the man certainly was to kill.

His hands were as steady as a rock, his aim full at the heart of the scout.

The latter was outlined against the firelight and a splendid target.

So sure of the scout's instant death was the corporal that he turned his head away, not to witness the fall of the man he had betrayed.

But, to the horror of all save Buffalo Bill, the weapon in the hands of Bob Brass did not explode.

There was only the snap of the hammer.

With a curse most malignant, and a dread of instant death, Bob Brass drew trigger again and again.

But the result was the same.

There was no report from the weapon, other than the click of the hammer.

"Kill him, corporal!"

"For God's sake be quick!"

The cry was in earnest, for the man thought he saw death before him.

Driven to act, the corporal turned toward Buffalo Bill, revolver now drawn, just as Bob Brass, in a frenzy, hurled with both hands the revolver full at the scout.

Buffalo Bill had realized that Bob Brass had been given the unloaded weapon by the corporal to kill him.

He also knew that the man was still heavily ironed, and he made no effort to fire at him in return.

The corporal also having an unloaded weapon, he did not regard him as dangerous, and so he calmly turned toward him at the appeal of Bob Brass to cover him with his weapons.

Unfortunately, however, for the scout, the revolver hurled with great force by Bob Brass struck him on the arm, knocking his weapon from his grasp, and then gave him a blow upon the breast that was most severe.

It knocked the breath from his body and felled him his length upon the ground.

"Kill him, corporal! kill him!" shrieked Bob Brass.

"Kill him, corporal! kill him!" yelled the prisoners in a chorus, all now sitting up and terribly excited.

The corporal had momentarily remained inactive, like one dazed by the situation he found himself in.

But he soon was convinced that unless he acted promptly his own life was in danger, and that if he did not kill Buffalo Bill he would no longer hold an atom of influence with the band of outlaws he hoped to command.

So the corporal acted.

He drew his revolver, cursed the scout as he fell, and pulled trigger.

But the weapon did not fire.

In dismay, he again pulled trigger.

The result was the same.

Again and again as his finger drew hard on the trigger there came that, to him, same sickening snap, instead of report.

Driven to desperation as he saw that the scout was not seriously hurt, and hearing the wild cries of the prisoners, he threw himself upon the prostrate form and grappled with him.

Buffalo Bill had regained his breath, and was just rising when the corporal threw himself upon him.

The weight sent him back upon the ground, and his revolver having been knocked from his hand, he held no weapon in his grasp.

He, however, had a revolver and knife in his belt, and these he must keep the corporal from getting, and, if necessary, use himself.

The corporal was a large man, one of great strength, and his fight now was the one of his life.

He had the advantage, too, of having made the attack, and caught the scout at a disadvantage.

But he discovered that Buffalo Bill was a man to dread under all circumstances.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ONE LIFE AGAINST NINE.

The scout knew his danger, all that he had to contend against, and just what victory or defeat meant to the outlaws and himself.

He remembered that the corporal was well known as an athlete, a boxer, wrestler, and man of great activity and strength.

But he was not in the least alarmed.

He had never yet met his match, and he did not now expect to do so.

Often had the officers at the fort wished to see a contest of strength between the corporal and the chief of scouts, but they had never met.

Now it was that they were to meet in a fight for the life or death of one.

The scout had his own life to protect, nine other lives to hold in his keeping.

The corporal had grasped for his throat, while he was feeling around for the revolver, struck from his hand by the well-aimed blow of Bob Brass with the unloaded weapon.

Buffalo Bill tore the corporal's hand from his throat with an iron force that made the soldier feel that he had met his match.

Confident in his strength, in his power to subdue the scout, he had suddenly made known to him that the stories of Buffalo Bill's phenomenal strength were not exaggerated.

Again he sought with one hand to grasp the scout's throat, with the other to tear a weapon, bowie or revolver, from his belt.

But the hand reaching for the weapons was grasped in a steel-like grip that caused him pain, and there held.

The hand that made the grip again at the throat was forced back, and the blows then aimed at the face of the scout were parried most skillfully.

It was a battle of giants, and the outlaws were wild with excitement.

"Men, we must reach them!" yelled Bob Brass, and the whole line tried hard to do so.

They got within three feet of the struggling men, but no further.

The lariat held firm.

In vain they tugged, waved and stretched their bound arms.

They could not reach the fighting giants.

"Corporal, hurl him this way."

"Force him within our reach!" shouted Bob Brass.

The corporal tried to obey.

Instead, he was hurled over on his back a yard further off.

The outlaws were in a mad frenzy of excitement.

They were simply gone mad with fear and hope.

They watched the struggle while they yelled encouragement to the corporal.

"Get one of his weapons from his belt!"

"Choke him!"

"Pick up the weapon yonder!"

"Drive your fist into his face!"

"Roll him over to us and we'll fix him, tied though we are!"

"Put your teeth into him!"

"Oh, pard! pard, don't let him do you, or we all hangs!"

These cries were meant to encourage the soldier.

Whether they did or not, he did not appear to be able to obey a single injunction, strive as he might.

He had never met a man who could handle him as did Buffalo Bill.

And handle him the scout did, for each blow was turned or caught on the arm, the other hand was still in a grip of steel, and the corporal had changed positions, he now being beneath the weight of his adversary.

Buffalo Bill was not fighting to kill, but to subdue.

He was determined to take his man alive.

Each weapon had been taken from his belt and hurled out of reach.

This proved that he was not fearful of the result.

It was like a death blow to the outlaws who saw it, and they tugged like mad at the lariat.

At the command of Bob Brass, several of them with the sharpest teeth were gnawing at rawhide plaited rope to cut it in two.

"Gnaw like beavers, men, and you'll soon get it cut!" cried Bob Brass.

It was an unlucky remark for him, as it reached the ears of Buffalo Bill.

At once he put forth all his strength to end the struggle.

Well he knew that if the eight men freed themselves from that line, stretched from tree to tree, that they would soon be upon him.

Bound as they were hands and feet, they could easily get the best of him.

They could pick up his weapons and quickly ended the struggle.

This would never do, and with a mighty effort he set to work to conquer his man.

He forced one arm beneath his knee and held it there.

Then the other was forced beneath the other knee, while his hands grasped the corporal's throat and tightened upon it.

Soon the struggles ceased and the soldier grew black in the face.

"It is nearly cut in two!"

"All together, men!"

"Throw your weight upon the lariat!" yelled Bob Brass, in excited tones.

The men did so, there was a snap, and all fell as the lariat broke, and with wild yells they began to rise to hurl themselves upon Buffalo Bill and end him then and there.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE ORDEAL ENDED.

Buffalo Bill had recognized just in time that the outlaws, if the lariat broke, would be upon him.

He tightened his grip upon the corporal's throat, dashed his clenched fist once, twice, thrice into his face, and felt that he was no longer dangerous.

The soldier lay limp as a rag.

He had been half choked to death, and stunned as well.

In an instant of time, the scout then grasped his two weapons from the ground, and facing the outlaws, as he crouched panting upon the ground, met them just as the lariat parted and they were scrambling up to throw themselves upon him.

The first to rise was Bob Brass.

He looked squarely into the muzzles of the scout's revolvers, and heard the threatening words:

"These weapons are loaded!"

"I have twelve shots, and you are but eight."

"Back! or take the consequences!"

Bob Brass shrunk back.

His men did the same, save one.

He rushed forward, bound though he was.

"I'll give you proof that I told the truth," and with the words the shot rang out.

With the report, the man uttered a cry and raised his bound hands to his head.

"I merely clipped your ear; but let it be a warning."

It was a warning, for the man quickly shrunk back.

"Corporal! oh, Corporal!" shouted Bob Brass.

"He is all right for a while.

"You get back in line between those men!"

The scout's order was sullenly obeyed.

Then Buffalo Bill turned to one of the saddles and got another lariat.

This was bound between the trees and passed between the arms of the men, thus securing each one.

As Buffalo Bill turned from his work he saw the corporal sitting up.

The man's face was bleeding and he was gasping for breath.

Instantly he stepped toward him with an end of the severed lariat.

Grasping his hands, he bent them behind his back and bound them there securely, passing the lariat down then to his ankles and making them secure.

The soldier still gasped for breath, and yet said not a word.

He seemed to know all, yet had not the power of resistance.

Stepping to the creek, Buffalo Bill filled a canteen, and returning, bathed the face and throat of the soldier, giving him also a few swallows of water.

The man seemed to quickly revive at this, and said in a low, hoarse tone:

"You are kind.

"I deserve death rather than kindness at your hands, or is it for the hope of revenge, to see me hanged?"

"It is to do my duty, only as I see it."

"I believe that."

"I was on your trail, for I know all that you have done, Dave Strong.

"You know?"

"Yes."

"What do you know?" asked the corporal in a louder voice and excitedly.

"That you killed a sergeant and sentinel at the fort."

"My God! that does mean that I am to hang, for you will take me back there."

"Yes."

"Why, corporal, you are better worthy to be our leader than I thought," called out Bob Brass, who, with the others, had heard all.

"Yes, a worthy leader," was the loud reply.

"Killed a sergeant and a sentinel, did he, Cody?"

"Yes."

"And you were upon his trail?"

"I was."

"Well, it only increases my admiration for you, as you certainly roped him in most cleverly."

"And when I had him cornered, and thought I would get his horse and provisions, for I did not wish to kill him."

"No, and had you been less merciful we would all have been free now," savagely said Bob Brass.

"It is hard to take the life of a man who has twice risked his to save yours."

"I spare no man that stands in my way, no, nor woman either.

"But it seems now as though we are in a very bad box."

"The rope first, the box afterward," said the corporal, with a little smile, and he added:

"Great God, Chief Cody, what strength you have.

"I never met my match before."

"I can return the compliment, corporal.

"But come, I wish to make you fast to this tree, for we must get what rest we can, as to-morrow I shall keep straight on to the fort, with only short halts."

"And to the fort he shall not take us, men, if we have our way, and we must, for nine of us, though bound, must subdue one man," shouted Bob Brass.

"I shall take you to the fort alive, if I can; dead, if I must," was Buffalo Bill's cool reply, and the remark had its weight, though Corporal Strong remarked:

"It is better to die, if we must, by bullet, rather than by a rope end."

Having secured all of his prisoners

again, Buffalo Bill threw more wood in the fire and then went off on a scout around the camp.

It was well that he did so.

CHAPTER XX.

A HIDDEN FOE.

Buffalo Bill had not long left the cliff, with his prisoners and Corporal Strong, when a horseman rode up to the rendezvous where Bob Brass had met the men, he had picked for scouting work.

The stranger was a man of fine presence, dressed in scouting garb, and a thorough type of a daring borderman.

He had a face that was darkly bronzed, was handsome and fearless, and he was well armed and mounted.

He looked disappointed when he drew rein at the rendezvous beneath the cliff and gazed about him as a man would who was surprised at the signs his experienced eye read.

"There has been trouble here, for the red stains are proof of that; but where are the graves, if any one was killed?" he muttered.

Dismounting, he carefully walked over the whole surroundings, after which he again took to the saddle and started off on the trail to the meadow.

Here he looked about with a determination to read all signs he saw, and then taking the trail again, followed it up the bank of the stream, through the gap and to the plateau which ended at the cliff.

For a long while the horseman searched about the cliff, and at last, as though his mind was made up, said aloud:

"I don't just understand it all; but I will follow the trail and see where it leads, and find out just what all these signs mean."

With this he once more mounted and started off upon the trail of Buffalo Bill and his captives.

Night found him still on the trail, but as then it led through a valley, he felt that he could not go far wrong by pushing on for a few miles further before he camped.

At last, just as the nature of the country was changing so that a trail might branch off in any direction, he decided to find a camping ground, so pushed off to the left, where there was an open space denoting grazing ground for his horse, and with timber near for him to spread his blankets in.

Suddenly he halted, for, as he approached the meadows he saw horses staked out there.

He counted them in the bright starlight, and then turned and rode back to the shelter of some willows he had found.

Here he dismounted and hitched his horse, and approaching the timber carefully, he came in sight of just one, then another camp-fire.

"They are camped there, for it can be none other than Brass and his men.

"But, observing the signs of trouble which I have, I must make no mistake but go slow."

Cautiously he approached the fire, when he halted quickly at the sound of a shot.

"There is still trouble there.

"What can it mean?" he muttered.

There were yells heard soon after the shot, oaths and voices in rage and excitement.

"I would like to go there and see what it means, yet I do not dare do so until I am sure the one I hold interest in is worthy."

With this he waited where he was, gazing toward the camp-fires and listening to every sound.

At length the sounds ceased over in the camp, and soon after the stranger saw a tall form pass from one camp-fire to the other.

He watched the form move about one of the fires for a moment, and then come directly toward where he was in hiding, as though to go toward the horses in the little meadow a couple of hundred yards distant.

"If he does not change his way he will come directly upon me.

"So be it, for the camp-fire told me who he is, and if I expect to win in the game I am going to play for gold, he must be the first one to remove from our path.

"Yes, Buffalo Bill, your minutes, yes, seconds, are numbered."

With this the man rested his revolver in the crotch of a tree and awaited the approach of the scout.

What impulse changed the steps of Buffalo Bill, who can tell, but suddenly, when yet a hundred feet from his ambushed foe, he turned short off to the left and disappeared in a thicket.

The man drew a long breath.

He could hardly believe his own eyes.

He was silent, thoughtful, and then spoke:

"It is said that a special Providence guards Buffalo Bill's life for some great good in the end.

"I believe it, for he foiled me in the very minute I felt his life was mine.

"But where has he gone?"

"I must look out for him.

"Did he suspect my presence here.

"Nonsense! It was only an intuition to change his steps in another direction.

"But, then, what is Buffalo Bill doing here, I wonder, and with Bob Brass and his men?"

"That looks strange, indeed, and the signs about that cliff, that shot a while since, the cries, and all tell me there is some trouble I cannot fathom.

"Whatever has happened, Buffalo Bill holds the mastery, or he would not be free.

"If he is here, then he has some of his men, or soldiers, with him, and that means, yes, it can mean nothing else than that he has Bob Brass and his men prisoners.

"Yes, that is it, and I must rescue them.

"A fitting act this will be for their new captain, to save them from Buffalo Bill.

"But now to find out how many I have to face, and first to see just what has become of Buffalo Bill."

CHAPTER XXI.

RECONNOITERING IN THE DARK.

If one would ask Buffalo Bill what changed his steps when he was walking right upon a hidden foe, he could not answer.

It was an impulse the same as had influenced him a hundred times before to do a certain act or not to go in a certain direction.

Hardly conscious that he felt an occult warning, he yet did so, and turned abruptly to the left into a pine thicket.

This led him to an open swale, and beyond was a fringe of willows.

He crossed the swale, and, entering the willows, determined to make a complete circuit of the camp.

Somehow he often acted from instinct, and there was a feeling in his heart that there was some danger near.

What it was he could not fathom, but the feeling was there, and he never disregarded a presentiment of evil, though his is not a really superstitious nature.

Reaching the willows, he suddenly sprang to cover, throwing himself flat upon the ground.

He had heard a sound not twenty feet from him.

For a moment he lay there, and then made a discovery.

A horse was hitched within a few paces of where he lay.

Who was his rider?

Where was his rider?

Buffalo Bill was the one to find out.

Approaching the horse, he unfastened him, led him out into the meadow and across where the other animals were feeding.

Next he unsaddled and unbridled him, and staked him out near the other horses.

The starlight revealed that he had captured a fine horse, thoroughly equipped, and with a full camping outfit.

But the rider?

He was not to be found.

"It must be one of the outlaw band who arrived late at the rendezvous and has followed to rescue his comrades.

"Now that I am onto him, it will not be such an easy rescue as he may think," muttered the scout.

Then he stood lost in thought fully a minute.

"If he is a comrade and would-be rescuer, then the two fires will reveal the camp.

"Naturally he will approach from the safest side, but as the prisoners are on the point around which the stream flows, he will have to get to them from the front, across the water.

"He could do the latter, release them and take them all that way, or, discovering that I was alone in charge of them, simply lie in wait for me to go there again.

"I think I will take to the water myself and see what I can discover, for if that fellow is lying in wait, he would surely see me before I would him.

"Who else than one of their band I cannot imagine, but still he may be a friend, and in such case I must go slow, for I do not wish to draw trigger on a pard under any circumstances."

So mused Buffalo Bill, and with him to come to a decision was to very promptly carry it out.

He accordingly began to scout around the camp until he came to the stream.

Here he took off his boots, outer clothing and hat, and crossed over without having to swim.

Upon the other bank there were boulders and large trees, and making his way along he soon drew opposite to where his prisoners were, guided by the fire near them.

Going a few rods above the fire, he entered the water, and holding his belt of arms high above him in one hand, he swam across the stream, which around the point ran swiftly and was quite deep.

Without a sound to disturb the prisoners, he reached the other bank and came out within fifteen feet of them.

All was quiet there, save the snoring of one of the outlaws and deep breathing of another.

"He is not here yet," muttered Buffalo Bill, and peering over the bank, he could see by the light of the camp-fire that all were lying down save one.

That one was Bob Brass, and he was sitting up.

But where was the rider of that horse which he had left with the other animals?

And again, might he not be then capturing all of the horses?

Never in his life before had Buffalo Bill felt such dire need of a comrade.

If he only had some one to guard the horses while he watched the prisoners.

The loss of the horses would mean perhaps the loss of his prisoners.

There was certainly some one about; the horse found in the willows was proof of that.

Whether he was friend or foe the scout had no way thus far of knowing.

The more he pondered over it, the more he became convinced that, as all was quiet thus far with the prisoners, he should return for a look at the horses, then creep into position to watch near the prisoners, and then keep on the move between them.

"I will go back," he muttered.

But as he uttered the words he distinctly heard a voice.

It came from across the stream, and it called a name:

"Bob Brass!"

Buffalo Bill at once crouched down behind the boulder by which he stood.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE STRANGE RESCUER.

Twice was the name of Bob Brass called, and the voice came apparently from across the stream.

At the second call there was a reply.

It was in a voice meant to be suppressed:

"Who calls Bob Brass?"

"A friend!"

"Friends are scarce just now."

"The more reason that one should be welcome."

"True."

"Where are you?"

"Across the stream."

"Who are you?"

"The king."

An oath broke from the lips of Bob Brass.

It was one of surprise and joy.

Then followed:

"Is that a square deal?"

"Did I ever fail you?"

"No," and in a lower voice Bob Brass said:

"Pards, wake up, for the man I told you of is here, our captain.

"I expected to meet him elsewhere, but he has got upon our trail and followed us, and that means life to all of us, but don't open your mouths, as Buffalo Bill has got the ears of a fox, and though I watched him go toward the horses, and have not seen him return to his camp, he may be within hearing."

This was spoken in a low, earnest tone, but the man with "the ears of a fox" heard every word.

The men were all awake now, and the snoring and hard breathing had ceased.

The prisoners were nearly twenty feet from the stream, which was fifty feet across, so the man on the other bank was not so very far off.

"Are there no guards near you, Bob Brass?" was heard from across the stream.

"We are all the prisoners of Buffalo Bill, and no one else is near."

"Remarkable! But he has gone some distance off."

"I wish he'd go to —"

A light laugh from the man who had called himself "The King" showed that he appreciated Bob Brass's warm intentions for the scout, but quickly followed the question:

"Can I reach you from that side?"

"Not unless you kill Buffalo Bill, and the odds are you can't."

"This stream is deep."

"You'll have to swim."

"I can do it, and you can all escape this way."

"I have a better plan if you come over."

"I'll come."

"Bring only your knife and a revolver."

"All right."

"I'll be with you in five minutes."

Buffalo Bill had heard every word.

He knew that the man was undressing himself to swim across the stream, and he at once determined to give him a reception.

The outlaws were all talking in a low, earnest tone, but the scout did not care what they said now.

His interest all lay in the bold stranger who was coming to their rescue.

With his arms Buffalo Bill had brought his lariat, hanging on a hook to the belt.

He quietly placed his revolvers on the rock within reach, and then coiled his lariat to use as a weapon when needed.

Peering out upon the waters swiftly running by, he waited to see the bold swimmer.

The heavy timber on both sides of the stream made all dark there, save the light of the camp-fire a rod beyond where the prisoners were.

Soon there was heard a splash in the stream, and a few minutes after a tall, nude form arose not ten feet from the boulder behind which Buffalo Bill was crouching and peered over the bank.

"All right, Bob?"

"Yes."

"No one near?"

"No one to be near save we unfortunates, unless Buffalo Bill is playing it on us."

"No, he is not at this end, I am certain."

"I hope not, but he's a cunning one."

"I have my revolver and bowie."

"You'll need both if you tackle him."

"All right."

"How many are with you?"

"Three dead men lying over yonder, then nine of us all told, for there is a soldier from the fort who is one of us now."

"You are all bound securely?"

"Yes, you'll have some work freeing us."

"But come now and we'll all wait here for the scout to come back, and he'll find us different from the way he left us."

"He will, indeed, and I'll go back and get my clothes, for a brave man is a coward when he is naked."

Bob Brass laughed lightly and replied:

"Now, come, for I am anxious to get free, though I'll be the last, and am ironed hands and feet."

"Buffalo Bill has the key to your irons, so you will soon be free," was the answer, and the stranger leaped lightly upon bank and began to walk toward the prisoners, his revolver in one hand, knife in the other.

He had gone only a few paces when suddenly there came a swishing sound in the air, like that made by a large bird startled into quick flight, and over the head of the strange rescuer nestled the noose of a lariat.

The man realized his danger on the instant and tried to spring out of the reach of the fatal coil, yet in vain, for there was a tightening of the line, a swing, and backward to the ground he was dragged with a suddenness and force that caused him to let fall both revolver and knife.

But the weapons fell within the reach of two of the prisoners.

CHAPTER XXIII.

QUICK WORK.

It was a most critical moment for Buffalo Bill, and no one recognized it better than he did.

He had caught the strange rescuer, it was true; yet in doing so he still had a strong man to subdue, while as he had fallen he had thrown, it so seemed, his revolver and bowie knife toward the prisoners.

The two weapons had fallen within reach of the men, at least two of them, and were eagerly grasped by them.

It was true that their hands were bound together at the wrists, that they were cramped by being tied as they had been for a long time.

Still they could use their hands when life depended upon it, and they meant to do so.

"Pass that revolver to me!" ordered Bob Brass, realizing his opportunity, for with manacles upon his wrists, connected by a short chain, he had much the better use of his hands than did the others.

"Pards, we are free!"

"Now, Buffalo Bill, show yourself!" shouted Bob Brass, as he grasped the revolver.

But Buffalo Bill made no reply.

He was too busy. He had by sheer strength dragged his captive backward to the bank, and with no gentle hand, for the bare back of the man was scratched by the ground and bushes.

The scout knew that he had not a second to lose, for the knife, even in well-tied hands, would soon sever the bonds of the prisoners.

As the captive reached the bank over the edge he went, struggling fearfully.

But the struggle quickly ended as the scout's fist twice fell upon his face with terrific force.

He knew that he must knock his man out at once.

He wished, too, that the prisoners might believe that he had put him out of existence, for, drawing his revolver he fired it into the air.

Then with a few coils of the lariat he bound his prisoner and called out sternly:

"Throw that knife and revolver out of your reach, Bob Brass."

"We haven't got any," was the reply, followed by some words in a low tone which Buffalo Bill did not catch.

"Obey, or I'll pick you off one by one!"

This was a startling threat, but the answer was a shot, and a bullet cut near the scout's ear.

But a responding shot followed, and a cry arose, with a curse and the words: "He has shattered my hand!"

"I have you between me and the camp-fire, so can pick you off at will."

"I have you between me and the camp me, or I'll fire down the line!"

There was a muttered order, and Buffalo Bill could see that the man with the knife was working hard.

Had his hands been free and not cramped by long being bound he could very quickly have cut the thongs.

As it was, however, it was no easy task, and this was in the scout's favor.

Then Bob Brass shouted: "Pards, it's the gallows if he gets us to the fort, and the chance of a bullet now."

"He has killed our captain, and he has sent a bullet through my hand, so free ourselves now!"

A yell broke from the others at these words, and Bob Brass struggled to his knees.

In his left hand he grasped the revolver and was holding it up as well as the manacles would permit.

But he had forgotten that the firelight revealed him distinctly to Buffalo Bill, who himself was in darkness, and had, besides, the stream bank's protection.

Quickly the scout rested his revolver upon the bank and drew trigger.

He had aimed at the hammer of the ruffian's cocked revolver as it was revealed by the firelight.

There was a ring as the unerring bullet struck the hammer, and the revolver was useless.

The weapon dropped from the shackled, benumbed hand of the outlaw, and a groan was uttered from a number of lips, as it was realized what the matchless shot of the scout had done.

Springing upon the bank Buffalo Bill with a bound was before the enraged prisoners, his revolver muzzle thrust into the face of one who had just been set free by his comrade with the bowie knife.

"Spring upon him, pard, and we will soon help you?" shouted Corporal Strong, from his place by the tree.

The man attempted to obey, while Bob Brass called out:

"Yes, we'll soon cut ourselves free and help you!"

Buffalo Bill, not wishing to kill unless driven to it, knew that severe measures must be taken, and without a second of delay.

He acted promptly, and it saved him, for, as the man sprang upon him, he was met by a crashing blow from the scout's revolver that dropped him as though a bullet had passed through his heart.

At the same moment a second man had been cut free by the bowie knife and leaped toward the scout.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE ESCAPE.

Buffalo Bill was not in the least rattled by his danger, and all he must do to escape it.

No one knew better that he was fighting the fight of his life.

The man he had captured was but stunned, and was only bound temporarily, so he might free himself, at any minute, and recrossing the stream to where his clothes had been left, secure other weapons.

Thus armed, he would be a most dangerous foe, and could pick the scout off at any time, for he would have the advantage in every way, Buffalo Bill having to guard both the prisoners and the horses.

Then there was the man lying at his feet, only stunned, a second one free and attacking him, and others working hard to sever their bonds with the bowie knife.

A more critical position the scout could not well imagine, yet not for a second did his nerve forsake him.

He grasped the man who assailed him and again the revolver barrel fell with great force right upon his head.

Down the ruffian dropped, and bending over him, Buffalo Bill thrust the muzzle of his weapon into the very face of the one who held the bowie, and cried in a voice not to be mistaken:

"Hand me that knife!"

There was a second of terrible suspense, and the weapon was thrust toward the scout, though loud were the cries of Bob Brass and the corporal for the man to use it.

Hurling the bowie out of reach, Buffalo Bill shouted:

"Down flat upon your faces, all of you! The man who hesitates I will surely kill!"

There was quick obedience. Even Bob Brass and the corporal knew that they had been foiled, that the scout would stand no dallying.

With no particularly gentle hand, the scout began to again secure the hands and feet of the three who had been cut free.

The two whom he had felled with a blow of his revolver were first attended to, and the lariats of the men were brought into use.

When, at last, all were secure, and more so than before, Buffalo Bill working quietly, notwithstanding the constant cursing from the gang, he said:

"You two men I will look to later, for those cuts on your head are severe and must be attended to."

"I was sorry to have to hurt you, but it was either that or lose my life."

The two men had revived, yet were silent and evidently suffering.

Having expertly and quickly secured his prisoners, Buffalo Bill walked toward the stream, for all the while he was anxious as to the fate of his other foe, the strange rescuer.

As he went by Bob Brass the latter called out:

"Do you know that you killed my best friend, Buffalo Bill?"

"No, when?"

"The one who lies dead over yonder."

"Ah, yes; your pard was he?"

"He was, and I'll have my revenge some day."

"Who was he?"

"Never mind who he was."

The scout walked on and sprang down over the bank to where he had left the man.

He was gone!

There lay the lariat on the sand, just where the prisoner had been left, but the prisoner had made his escape.

Nude as he was, he evidently had decided, upon returning to consciousness, to get back with all speed to where his clothes and other weapons were.

The water, too, would help his lacerated back, he doubtless decided.

Not a word did the scout utter to inform the prisoners that the particular pard of Bob Brass was not only not dead, but had escaped.

He knew but too well what that escape meant, though he was glad to recall that he had his horse, his outfit, one revolver he could account for, and his knife.

Still, the man must have a rifle and another revolver.

With both the prisoners and the horses to look after, Buffalo Bill felt sure that the stranger could get either one or the other out of his possession—if he did not in some way prevent.

Feeling that he was in a scrape, the

scout sprang upon the bank and approached the prisoners.

"You've got your lariat, I see, so I suppose death keeps my poor pard quiet," Bob Brass remarked.

"I have other use for my lariat," was the evasive reply, and Buffalo Bill passed on to the camp-fire.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE UNERRING LASSO.

Buffalo Bill felt that his life was at stake as he walked up to the camp-fire.

He knew that the escaped stranger could easily pick him off from across the stream with his rifle.

But he must take the chances to carry out his plan to circumvent the man.

That plan will soon be revealed.

Straight up to the fire he walked, and fortunately, it was dying out, so did not cast such a bright light.

Instantly he had scattered the embers, and picking up one end of the burning logs, he cast them into the stream.

In a couple of minutes all was darkness.

Just why the scout had put out the fire not one of the prisoners could imagine.

They had not the slightest doubt of the strange rescuer's death, so supposed the scout had some reason for putting out the fire which he intended they should guess at.

So when there was only a few glowing embers left, Buffalo Bill walked over to where he had left his blankets, and, spreading them some thirty feet away from the prisoners, lay down as though to sleep.

He moved about like a man who was very tired, and surely he was, but he did not intend by any means to seek rest.

The prisoners could not see him after he lay down, and they did not observe that he noiselessly crept away out of the little point.

While they supposed him sleeping, or at least resting, he was making his way to where he had left his outer clothing, and intended from there to go to where the horses were.

Between the prisoners and the horses he would lie in wait for the man whom he now had so much reason to dread being free.

The other camp-fire was still burning, but that was of no importance, as neither prisoners nor horses were near it.

Having gotten his clothes, the scout noiselessly made his way to the edge of the timber, where he could look out upon the horses.

They were still there, and did not appear to be disturbed by the close presence of any one.

But the scout felt assured in his mind that the first act of the strange rescuer would be to carry the horses off to a secure spot, after which he could return and attempt to get a shot at him, thus setting his companions free.

That he had put the fire out made him feel that the stranger would suppose he intended to remain by the prisoners and in hiding, to catch him when he made another attempt to free them.

But Buffalo Bill was one who was up to all border cunning and bold trickery.

He could play at any game another man could, and was particularly apt in seeming to intuitively know just what their intentions would be.

Feeling sure that the man had escaped just before he had gotten back to the spot where he had left him, and, with having to recross the stream, dress, make his way down upon the other bank and there again to cross over and get to where the horses were, that he had not yet had time to get to them, Buffalo Bill boldly decided to walk out among them.

This he did.

No one was there.

Instantly he made his own thoroughly trained animal lie down, and right at his back he also crouched.

Thus passed the moments until half an hour had gone by.

Then the scout saw several of the feeding horses raise their heads and prick up their ears.

The stranger was surely coming. He was coming, too, from the further side of the camp, so had made a detour.

This had taken him longer to get there. The scout saw him crossing the meadow and he got his lariat ready.

He also had his revolver and knife within easy reach.

Nearer and nearer came the form.

It reached the first animal, hesitated a moment, passed to the next, and then came toward where the scout lay by the side of his own horse.

Then he turned as though to go to others, and Buffalo Bill saw that he was pulling up the stake-ropes and tying them about the necks of the horses.

This must not go on, or he would set the whole lot free and stampede them.

So the scout arose and his lariat swung around and around his head.

The man was not thirty feet away, tying another stake-rope about the neck of a horse.

Another swing, and the coil, unerring in its aim from the hand of Buffalo Bill, and heavy from its wetting, was thrown with all the skill and force the scout's good right hand could muster.

The noose settled well over the head, there was a startled exclamation, a bound into the air, a sharp twang as the rope became taut, and the form was dragged backward and fell with a dull, heavy thud.

And the form did not rise, did not struggle.

Bounding forward, Buffalo Bill bent over the prostrate man, looked closely into his face, pressed his hand over the heart, and said solemnly:

"An Indian, and dead!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE CAPTURE.

"Dead, and an Indian," was the verdict of Buffalo Bill, upon reaching the side of the fallen man.

He had seen in the starlight that it was not the man he had before captured, that he had come there to thwart.

Verily he seemed to be getting more and more into trouble and difficulties.

That the one he had landed was an Indian the scout read aright.

He was sure that he was the scout of some band camped not very far away.

He had seen the camp-fire, reconnoitred, and was going to stampede the horses, leaving the pale faces afoot.

In the bound he had given, when dismayed, he had sprung forward with such force that the tightening lariat had simply broken his neck, killing him instantly.

Moving the head from side to side the scout saw that the neck was broken.

He had nothing to fear from the red-skin.

There was no need to bind his limbs, for Death had palsied them forever.

The lasso was taken from about the neck, and the body was drawn up close to the scout's horse, which had not yet risen from the ground.

Then Buffalo Bill once more begun to watch and wait.

He knew that it was midnight now.

The strange rescuer must soon appear, or he would go back to have a look at his prisoners.

With Indians near he made up his mind as to his course.

He would lead his horse up to the camp if he captured the stranger, mount his prisoners, and press right on through the night and day to the fort.

It would be a hard ride for horses and men, but he would take no more chances, crowded as he was by prisoners and dead men.

He was particularly anxious now to get away soon, as the camp from which the Indian came could not be far away, and daylight would put them on his trail.

Then, too, he was most anxious not to have to fire upon the stranger when he saw him.

He wished no sound to alarm the band of Indians, the comrades of the one he had killed.

As he waited he saw a form leave the timber.

"Now for him," he muttered.

But it was not the strange rescuer.

Instead it was the Indian pony following his dead master.

He had pulled up the stake rope and was dragging it after him.

The pony came right up to the scout, and was readily captured.

Hardly had he and the other horses freed by the Indian been again staked out when another form appeared.

This time there was no mistake.

It was the strange rescuer.

He came along, too, as though he had nothing to fear.

He walked boldly in among the horses, pulled up the stake pin of first one, then the other, and then begun to gather them together.

As he came up to the horse of Buffalo Bill, still lying down, he was leading four of the animals.

Up rose the horse, but up with him rose the form of Buffalo Bill.

With a leap like a panther's, the scout was upon the man, and down he went backward under the weight and blow dealt.

The scout's hand was upon his throat, as he fell, choking off all outcry, and the surprised man felt the cold point of a knife pressed hard against his neck and heard the low, hoarsely muttered words:

"Resist and you are a dead man!"

There was a nod in answer, for the iron grip of the scout choked off all utterance.

Then the scout said: "As I rise turn upon your face."

"An outcry will cause you to feel my knife blade between your ribs."

The man obeyed, and the lariat of the scout was quickly brought into requisition.

The hands were securely bound behind the back and the feet also secured, but given length enough of line to walk slowly.

"Now, rise."

The man obeyed.

"I you move from this spot I will—no, I'll see that you don't," and Buffalo Bill bound the man to the stake rope of his horse, knowing that he would remain where he left him.

Then the scout caught the horses that had been released by the stranger in the scuffle, and bringing them up mounted his prisoner upon his own horse, tying him to the saddle and removing the weapons hanging on the saddle horn to his own horse.

"I had little to fear from you, I see, as your weapons were here, save those you took with you," said the scout.

The prisoner made no reply.

Having brought up the Indian pony, the scout bound his dead master upon him, the stranger being surprised and looking on with wonder as to how the body got there.

Having collected all of the horses, Buffalo Bill led them up toward the camp where the prisoners were, and where the saddles and bridles had been left.

Thus far the prisoner just captured had not spoken.

He appeared dazed at the misfortune that had befallen him.

CHAPTER XXVII.

BUFFALO BILL'S PRISONERS EXPRESS THEIR OPINIONS.

The prisoners, nine in number, with the corporal, were not very long in making the discovery that Buffalo Bill was not lying behind the tree where they had seen him spread his blankets and drop down.

The corporal, nearest to him, had kept his eye upon the scout, even in the darkness, and had been sure that he saw him glide away.

He was determined to find out, and after waiting for five minutes or more he raised a rock with both of his feet, lay upon his back, moved his legs to and fro, and gave it a toss as well as he could.

For such an awkward manner of

throwing a stone weighing a pound or more, the corporal did splendidly, for it fell right where the scout was supposed to be lying.

If he had been there it would have hit him, and he would naturally have thought it had been thrown with intent to harm him.

"I knew he had slipped away, Brass," said the corporal.

"Who?"

"The scout!"

"Where is he?"

"Gone scouting around, I guess."

"I heard him move a minute ago."

"That was a stone I threw."

"Well, we can't do anything."

"Not that I see just now."

"Do you see any plan for the future?"

"We are nine, he is but one, and bound as we are, we ought to better him in some way."

"I am with you, for I am going to avenge the captain if I live."

"It was just as well that Buffalo Bill killed the man you call captain."

"Why so?"

"Well, I am to be captain of this lay-out if we don't all hang."

"Get us out of this fix, and now that the captain is dead I will say yes."

"We have not reached the fort yet."

"No."

"And its a long trail for one man to take nine prisoners over."

"I grant that; but you appear to forget who the man is that has got us dead to rights!"

"No; Buffalo Bill can be worsted as can any other man."

"I'm with you if you can prove it."

"I intend to try."

"You know he single handed roped nine of us in, killed one, and then took you in out of the wet."

"I have not forgotten it."

"He then got that pard of mine in the very moment of his success in rescuing us, and, though we got hold of a revolver and a knife, and three of us cut loose, he put a hole through my hand, and, as I at first believed, had shattered the bone."

"I am glad it was no worse."

"So am I, and I must say he fixed it up for me with the skill of a doctor."

"And he took the hammer off of your revolver clean as anything could be done," said one of the men.

"He did, and no better shots were ever made than the one at my hand and the other at the hammer of my revolver."

"That's so," came in a chorus from the men.

"Ah, I admit he is a good one, Pard Brass, but even he can be downed," the corporal said.

"He has never yet been."

"That's so."

"He is going to hang us all, yet."

"He has a charmed life."

"There lead hain't mined ter make the bullet thet kills Buffalo Bill."

"No, nor ther steel hain't made yet thet kin knife him."

"Pards, he hain't no common man."

"He are a howling team."

"You bet he cut our ther work fer himself ter do and he is going ter do it."

"That means hang us."

Both Bob Brass and the corporal listened to these opinions the men expressed about Buffalo Bill, and the former said:

"Yes, he is a very wonderful man, that same scout, and if I didn't hate him so I would admire him immensely."

"Yes, one must admire such grit, nerve, and expertness in all he sets out to do; but after all he is but a man, and he has got to put us on our horses, take us off, put us on again, and take us a long trail to the fort."

"Very true; but he'll do it," said Brass.

"I say no!"

"Well, since he killed my pard, I believe he can do anything, for I thought that the King bore a charmed life."

"The King?"

"Yes, that is what my pard was called, for he was king of them all."

"Yet he went under."

"Very true."

"And so I say if we will watch our chances, keep our eyes on each other, take every opportunity and risk to act together, even if one, two, or three of us should go under, we can down him, and escape."

"Will you try it, men?"

"We are ready," came the low, determined reply.

"Well, I will lead you, so keep your eyes on me, and I tell you that Buffalo Bill will never get us to the fort."

"Boys, you have the corporal's pledge," said Bob Brass.

"We have!" came as though from one man.

"Very well, now be on the watch, for I do not intend to hang."

"Oh, Lord!" cried one of the men suddenly.

"What is it?" asked all in a breath.

"We are done for sure, hanged, for see yonder comes a lot of cavalymen," and he pointed through the darkness to an open space where were visible a number of horses coming directly toward them.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

SURPRISING THE PRISONERS.

The prisoners lost heart at sight of the coming cavalcade.

They could only see in the darkness a body of horsemen, as they supposed, approaching, and mistook them for cavalry from the fort.

This thought did away with all hope of escape for them.

Instead, however, it was Buffalo Bill with his prisoner, the dead redskin, and leading the horses.

As he drew near the scout halted his horses, gathered up the embers of the scattered fire, and soon had a blaze high enough for the prisoners to see that no United States troopers were there.

When the fire sent its light upon the scene there were their own horses and a man was seated upon one of the animals, a dead body was strapped to another—the Indian pony.

Brighter burned the fire, and suddenly Bob Brass uttered a cry.

It was at sight of the horseman he had but indistinctly seen before.

"My God! It is you, King? "He did not kill you, after all," cried Bob Brass.

"No, Brass, I am all right, save a badly scratched back and being a prisoner; but you are in the same bad plight, I see," answered the man.

"Yes, but how did one man master you?"

"It was Buffalo Bill, I find."

"Yes, that accounts for it; but whose dead Indian is that?"

"He belongs to Buffalo Bill, as we all seem to do."

"How many are you?"

"Ten with you, and four dead bodies, counting the redskin."

"And Buffalo Bill is alone?"

"As you see."

"Do you mean that he has alone taken in the outfit?"

"It is just what he has done."

"I do not feel so badly, then, at my being captured by him."

"He has a way of doing things that other men would never attempt."

"So it seems."

"But what is he going to do with you?"

"Take us to the fort."

"For what reason?"

"To hang us."

"For what?"

"He claims that we are outlaws."

"Ah! Then I suppose he will wish to include me in the same category, when I only saw comrades in trouble and intend to help you out."

Buffalo Bill had been moving about the while, gathering the saddles and bridles of the party, and preparing to leave the camp.

He overheard the last that was said, and, turning, fixed his eyes upon the stranger.

He saw him distinctly now by the light of the fire, and said:

"So you recognized your friends in the darkness, and came to rescue them, did you?"

"I know Bob Brass, but none of the others."

"I intended to rescue him."

"From what?"

"He was a prisoner."

"To a Government officer, yes; but how could you recognize him in the dense darkness?"

"I saw him by the firelight."

"What were you doing sneaking around my camp at night?"

The man was silent, and Buffalo Bill continued:

"You are in league with Bob Brass, and he is an outlaw. So you go to the fort with the others of the band."

"I am an honest miner, and no outlaw."

"That you will have to prove before the court of officers that will try you, for I accuse you, Bob Brass, and his followers of being outlaws known as the League of Mounted Miners."

It was very evident that Buffalo Bill was in no very amiable mood, after all he had passed through in capturing and guarding his prisoners.

He knew his danger still was great, had had proof that a band of Indians was not far away, and a long, fatiguing and perilous ride was before him, with a body of desperate men to carry along.

But he did not flinch from his work, and one by one bridled and saddled the horses.

Then the camp outfit was brought from the other fire and put on his horse, while the bodies of the dead men were strapped securely upon the animals selected to bear them.

When all preparations had been made, Buffalo Bill went first to the corporal and quietly unbound him from the tree.

The lariat holding the others in a line was fastened again, showing that the scout intended taking no chances.

Though anxious to get well on his way before dawn, Buffalo Bill did not show his prisoners that he was in a hurry, or was in the least disturbed by the task before him.

The corporal was securely fastened to his saddle, and returning to the line Buffalo Bill said sternly:

"I am in no humor to be trifled with, men, and the first man who shows me any of his ugly spirit or attempts to detain me, I shall let him feel the weight of my revolver on his head."

"Now I have warned you, so heed."

Whatever plan the man had formed to delay and bother the scout this threat prevented it, for the men at once obeyed his every word.

But Buffalo Bill took no chances, and one by one the prisoners were taken from the line to their horses, made to mount, and were bound to their saddles.

Then the horses were tied two by two, lines running back from the scout's saddle horn to the bit of all the animals and to their great surprise Buffalo Bill had successfully mastered all difficulties and started them upon the trail to the fort.

CHAPTER XXIX.

ON THE TRAIL.

Buffalo Bill had thrown more wood upon the two fires before leaving.

He knew that if discovered by the Indians they would lose considerable time reconnoitering to see if there were persons camping there, and not attempt to follow the trail until daylight.

How many Indians were near the scout had no means of knowing, but he felt sure that the band did not number less than half a hundred.

If he got two hours' start of the redskins, and it was just that long before day break, he believed he could keep well ahead of all pursuers.

At least, he could but try.

He knew that the outlaws in that part of the country would be in league

with the redskins, and, when pressed by the soldiers, after some more daring and cruel act than usual, they always retreated to the Indian country.

If Bob Brass and his men were friendly with the Indians, it would make it that much harder for himself, Buffalo Bill well knew.

In such a case he would be the one to suffer most, as he could not trust his prisoners with arms to fight back the redskins.

Along the trail then rode Buffalo Bill, keeping the stranger, his last captive, by his side.

Bob Brass was next, with a dead outlaw by his side, and then came the corporal with the Indian pony and his dead master.

The two other dead bodies each had an outlaw riding by their side, and the rest of the band followed.

In putting the prisoners upon their horses, Buffalo Bill had bound their hands to the saddle horns and their weapons were also swung to their horses.

At a steady, brisk pace the scout led the way, the darkness not the least disconcerting him, and eagerly did the outlaws watch for the coming of day.

"Men, I shall not halt until noon, unless forced to do so, and then only for an hour, and to give you a mouthful of food and water."

"Then I shall push on to the fort without another stop, if possible, so nerve yourselves for a very hard ride."

"It will kill me," said one of the outlaws.

"Then you will be in luck not to live to die on the gallows," Bob Brass answered, while the corporal asked:

"Why push us so hard, Chief Cody, for I have had but little rest, and am feeling badly?"

"That is your own fault, not mine. David Strong, and with the outfit I have here to take care of, I shall take no chances of escape."

"I am as tired as any of you, and have had some rather hard usage, but I will stand the ride all right, and you must do the same."

There was a sound like a groan ran along the line, and the stranger asked:

"If you see one of the men greatly overtaxed, will you not halt?"

"No, for this is as fine a nest of 'possums as I ever saw, and should a man break down he must take the consequences, for he is tied to his saddle so cannot fall."

"But the horses may give out, Buffalo Bill," urged Bob Brass.

"Then the others will have to do double work."

"This is not like you, Chief Cody, for I have always known you to be of a kind, not cruel, nature."

"Corporal, what I have had to go through within the past twenty-four hours would change any man's nature."

"I left the fort in chase of you, and you know what followed."

"No, I am merciless now, until I get you to the fort and my duty is done."

The dawn was breaking now, and as it grew brighter and lighter the men eagerly looked for some sign upon the scout's face to show a ray of hope for them.

There was none.

He was haggard, pale, and evidently felt the great strain upon him.

The men, too, looked the worst by far from what they had passed through with.

Two of them had their heads cut by the blow of Buffalo Bill, who had plastered up the wounds as best he could.

Two others, the stranger and the corporal, looked like wrecks, from the blows dealt them by Buffalo Bill in his struggle with them.

Bob Brass had one hand bound up where the bullet of Buffalo Bill's revolver had gone through it.

The corporal's uniform was torn, and altogether they were a very hard-looking party, for the scout also looked the worse for wear.

Then there was the ghastly freight car-

ried by the Indian pony and three of the horses.

The scout had wrapped the forms in blankets, but dead bodies have a weird look even when covered up.

The sun revealed all distinctly now, as it peered above the mountain tops.

and it certainly revealed a very strange sight in one man guarding half a score of desperate prisoners, whom his daring and prowess had subdued.

As the trail led over a ridge Buffalo Bill turned in his saddle and glanced back over the plain they had crossed.

He did not even start or change color, did not hasten his pace, or make a comment, but what he saw was enough to appall even his stout heart.

The glance backward had revealed several miles away fully a hundred Indians in full pursuit.

CHAPTER XXX.

REDSKINS IN PURSUIT.

Another eye than Buffalo Bill's had seen the pursuing Indians.

It was the stranger, and he, too, made no comment then, as he glanced backward.

He simply watched the scout ride quietly down the sloping, winding trail, lead the horses into a stream of water, pass the canteen around among the men for a refreshing draught, and then look to the girths and straps of each saddle, prisoner, and body.

This done he mounted and started on at a brisk trot.

"May I ask if you saw that band of Indians pursuing us, Buffalo Bill?" he asked.

"Oh, yes!"

"There must be a hundred of them."

"At least that many."

"They saw us."

"Beyond doubt."

"And are now in pursuit?"

"Of course."

"What are they?"

"They belong to the same tribe as the dead one here."

"You said nothing about seeing them to any one of us."

"Why should I, when I considered it the business of no one else than myself."

"You are a cool one, and I cannot help admiring you."

"Thanks."

"You came slowly down the trail so as not to distress the horses, watered them, looked to the girths and lariats, and now are off in flight."

"Certainly."

"With no hope whatever of escaping from those redskins, unless you do so alone?"

"I never desert my party, sir."

"You will have to this time, for those Indians come on at a pace that showed their ponies are fresh."

"So I observed."

"What will you do to escape them?"

"There is a rocky mound a few miles ahead, and I will stand them off there, for we could not find a better place for men and horses, while there is a spring on the hill, some grass, wood, and a fine protection against a hot fire."

"But you are only one man."

"The Indians don't know that."

"Ah!"

"They will count about a dozen, think we are well supplied with provisions, as they will take the dead bodies for packs, and they will be very cautious about crowding us."

"But they may besiege us for days?"

"No, for the stage goes by to-morrow, and the Pony Riders' trail is in sight; no we will be reported and get help from the fort."

"But you will let us help you fight them off?"

"Hardly, as I have no desire to fall into equally as cruel hands as though the Indians captured me!"

"Then you expect to stand them off alone?"

"Yes, for I have all of your rifles, revolver, and—"

will protect you from—your friends, I may say."

The men had heard this conversation with surprise.

They had listened with the very deepest attention.

Not one, save the stranger, had seen the pursuing Indians when Buffalo Bill had.

At once hope arose in their hearts for escape.

They, however, saw that Buffalo Bill was not to be nonplussed.

He was not the man to surrender even to what appeared a certainty of release for his prisoners.

They heard his plan of action and knew that they could but submit.

What he had said about the coach passing and the Pony Express Riders, several of them knew was true.

Also they knew that one man, and that man Buffalo Bill, handling a dozen rifles, several of them repeating weapons, and twice as many revolvers, could fool the redskins into a belief that the whole party of white men were fighting to stand them off.

That the scout would not trust them with weapons his words very quickly let them know.

"Well, Buffalo Bill, if you get safely out of this difficulty, and still hold us prisoners, I shall set you down as a most phenomenal man," said the stranger.

"As I will also," put in Bob Brass, while the corporal called out:

"So will I; but it cannot be done."

"This time, Chief Cody, you have got a larger contract on your hands than you can master."

Buffalo Bill's face did not change a muscle.

He still kept the horses at a gallop and appeared to be wholly unmoved by this new danger threatening.

At last the hill he had referred to came in sight.

It was a rocky mound, several hundred feet in height, heavily timbered at the top, with bare slopes, and a couple of acres in size.

All about it was a plain, and no better position could be found to be defended by a party besieged.

With a dozen men to defend it, even a hundred Indians would be cautious about making an attack.

But there was only one man to fight, half a score to be worse than useless.

"There they come," and Buffalo Bill pointed to the Indians coming over the ridge, and then added:

"And there is our stronghold."

"What a man!" muttered the stranger, as he looked into the face of the scout.

CHAPTER XXX.

BUFFALO BILL MAKES A THREAT.

The scout did not even quicken his pace at sight of the pursuing redskins, as they came sweeping over the ridge, all of them miles off yet.

He simply kept the horses up to the same gait and headed straight for the mound, so opportunely appearing before them, and now but half a mile away.

As they approached it the men saw that the base was almost a wall, only here and there with a break in it, and some of the party knew it by the name of The Tombstone, for it looked much like a massive monument ever green with weeds, the trees on the top appearing as the latter.

Buffalo Bill knew it well, for often before had he camped there, and several times had it been a place of refuge against Indians.

A small stream, the overflow of the spring, cut its way along the plain toward a larger one in the valley, and through this Buffalo Bill led the way up to the summit of the mound.

Those of the outlaws who did not know the hill felt their hearts sink within them at sight of what they knew was a stronghold, even though defended by one man, against many.

They could realize that the scout was

such a man as was Buffalo Bill, with a dozen rifles at his disposal, would make the Indians feel that there were a number of defenders there, and dead shots at that.

The scout took matters with the greatest coolness, although he acted very promptly and with a determination that showed he knew all that was before him and would not yield his hard-won triumph without a desperate struggle.

He halted his men upon the hilltop, just where they could not be seen by the Indians, and then tied the horses, so that they could not escape or stray.

His next move was to gather the weapons and place a rifle and revolver at different points, where he would have them when most needed.

This done, he made a circuit of the guns, and looked them over carefully, to see that all were in good working condition.

The Indians meanwhile were coming on at a run, those lagging behind hastening up to form a compact mass.

"They intend to charge you in a body, Buffalo Bill, and that will quickly end it, much confidence as you have in yourself and brave as you are," said the man whom Bob Brass had called "The King."

"It is but a bluff to feel our strength and discover what we will do. Let them come!" answered the scout, as he took his stand at the spot he deemed the most advantageous for opening the fight.

The outlaws watched him closely, and could but admire his game stand; but, there was an expression on the face of each man which the scout could but remark. It was a look of decided hope, and he had seen it come upon their countenances when he returned from the round of placing the weapons.

The men he had heard there talking in a low tone to each other, and a whisper had passed along the line that seemed to mean much to them.

It was the catching of only a word or two that placed the scout upon his guard, but that much was sufficient for him to read what was intended, as he had heard the words:

"You understand their language perfectly, and—"

That was all, but the words were addressed to Bob Brass and by King.

He did not appear to have heard anything, but as he stood ready to meet the charge, Buffalo Bill suddenly turned and faced his prisoners.

He glanced into the face of each man, and he saw now that all were radiant with hope of speedy release.

"Men, I have something to say to you," he said.

"And I wish to say to you, Buffalo Bill, that our blood will be upon your head, for you know that we are bound hands and feet and cannot protect ourselves, while if you released us we would help you to defend ourselves and could no doubt beat the Indians off."

The speaker was Corporal Strong, and Buffalo Bill smiled at his words, and replied:

"What I was going to say to you all was that you, Bob Brass, understand the language of these redskins, and several more of you may also do so, and if there is a call to them from any one of you as they come up, I shall turn and shoot that one dead in his saddle, bound as he is."

"Preservation is the first law of nature, and I have my life to care for, and you men to take as prisoners to the fort, and I shall do so if it is within my power."

"As you are not defending yourselves, you all know that the redskins are the allies of outlaws, and would not harm one of you, finding that your own people were against you."

"I have you to defend, and I shall do so to the extent of my ability: but remember my threat, and I mean it, so help me Heaven, that I shall kill the man that utters a word when those redskins make their rush upon me."

"You are warned, so heed—they are—"

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE RUSH OF THE REDSKINS.

The threat of Buffalo Bill changed the face of every man from hope to blank despair.

They saw their trust in calling to the Indians to come on, that only one man defended the hill, and that man their great foe, the Chief of Scouts at the fort, the one above all others whom they had longed to capture or kill.

They dared not now utter a word, or the lips that did so would then and there be silenced forever.

Buffalo Bill was a man of his word, he would keep his threat, and it would be only to sacrifice his own life for others, for Bob Brass, or any other man speaking the redskin tongue, to call out the situation of affairs.

The outlaws were not then so magnanimous, and all felt that their hope had faded to get release, unless the Indians broke through the deadly fire of the scout.

How Buffalo Bill had discovered their intentions was a puzzle to them.

It was certainly as though he had read their very thoughts.

As he turned back to meet the rush, the outlaws looked at each other and sighed.

But interest in the remarkable spectacle of the brave scout intending to fight such odds sent their gaze upon him.

Would the Indians make the goal?

Would they be rescued?

These thoughts crowded upon them, with the knowledge also that the coach and the Pony Rider passing along the trail would hear the firing, doubtless afar, turn from the direct way, and send from a relay station word at once to the fort that the Indians were besieging some whites at Tombstone Mound.

This would end all hope for them, they knew, and Buffalo Bill would triumph, as he usually did.

The redskins meanwhile had gathered in a band, and held a council of war.

Had they known that there was but one man to fight them, they would not long have hesitated.

But they supposed that they had a dozen foes to face, and all of them well armed, while they were entrenched in a spot as strong as a fort.

They were all of a hundred in number, had formed in a compact mass, and were moving toward the hill, singing a war song as they rode along, their ponies in a slow walk.

Buffalo Bill knew their methods well, and he was aware of just what they would do.

He knew that they had no idea of breaking through the fire then, unless they found it weak and not deadly, but would come on to feel just what kind of foes they had to deal with.

This done, they would, in the dilatory method peculiar to redskins, arrange their plans for an attack or a siege.

The different rifles of the outlaws Buffalo Bill had placed on rocks from twenty to thirty feet apart, and his intention was to run from one to the other, carrying his own repeating rifle slung at his back for a last resort.

There were the revolvers, too, with each rifle, but these would only do for close work, should the redskins reach the hill.

Standing quietly in the central position he had chosen, Buffalo Bill waited the advance of the red horsemen, the rifle of The King, and it was also a repeater, in his hand.

Taking the range of the rifle as good at five hundred yards to kill, the scout determined to make the Indians feel what they had to face.

Nearest to him on his left was the rifle of Bob Brass, also a repeater, and of long range.

On his right, thirty feet away, was the breech-loading carbine of Corporal Strong, and it threw a bullet at long range to kill, and could be fired rapidly.

In addition, Buffalo Bill had his own trusted rifle to fall back upon, and he well knew what that would do at long range, and in the way of ready firing, and

that he had sixteen good shots in the magazine.

As the body of redskins advanced nearer, still walking their ponies, still singing their war song, Buffalo Bill raised the rifle of King, and, taking good aim, at one of the three chiefs in the band, pulled trigger.

It was a long distance, and yet the pony of the chief dropped in his tracks.

The Indians halted quickly, there were loud outcries, gesticulations, and then a sudden rush forward with demoniacal yells.

The scout met their start by emptying King's rifle into their midst, firing rapidly, but with aim, and not at random.

A couple of ponies and a brave were seen to fall, while another warrior clung to the neck of his horse, evidently badly wounded.

But on the Indians came. Springing the few paces to one side, the carbine of the corporal was seized and fired rapidly, and others of the redskin band felt the unerring aim of the scout.

Next came the rifle of Bob Brass, and in the same rapid but deadly way it rattled forth its leaden hail and with disastrous results.

But, on the Indians came, maddened by the attack and that they had met with losses, which they had not expected at that distance.

They had reached the foot of the hill, were crowding into the narrow trail in the wall of rock to ascend, when the shots fell thick and fast into their midst, for, just then, the scout had made a stand and opened with his own repeating rifle.

Would they come on in the face of that galling fire? was the question.

CHAPTER XXXII.

ONE MAN AT BAY.

The faces of the outlaws had begun to brighten. The Indians had reached the base of the hill. The trail was narrow, rugged, and steep, yet they must come on, for could one man stand at bay against a hundred?

It did not seem possible, yet there one man stood, firing calmly, aiming with unerring precision, and thus making each shot tell.

The Indians recoiled under the storm of that deadly repeating rifle, for they could not face it with the odds of the rugged, steep trail also against them.

The second chief fell, and there was a halt.

Some of the redskins took shelter among the rocks at the base of the hill, while others turned and stampeded.

Rushing from rifle to rifle, the scout had fired into the crowded mass. If he did not take deliberate aim, his bullet must find man or beast.

Grasping a couple of revolvers, these were emptied in the same quick way.

But, the braves had broken now—had become wild with dismay, and in a body sped back to safety.

Some of them remained concealed under cover of the rocks, but the most of them rushed for dear life away from that fatal spot.

Buffalo Bill had fought a grand battle, though it was from a fort, as it were.

He had brought down a dozen ponies, and how many braves had fallen no one knew.

They had sent a few shots up at the top of the hill, and a shower of arrows, but only one had been struck, and only slightly wounded, while, strange to say, the dead bodies of the three outlaws, as they were bound across their saddles, had each been hit by an arrow!

The brave scout did not rest upon his laurels. He had checked the Indians in their first mad rush, but well he knew they had come upon but one side of the hill—that there were several other trails upon different sides. Could he successfully defend all of these, when the force was divided?

He thought not.

Then, too, could he defend the position against a night attack? This he feared

The braves would not attack again until night, so he made up his mind to act without delay.

First, he would reload his weapons, and the long range repeaters he would keep close at hand.

His intention was to take flight at once. Fortunately, the outlaws had all been kept mounted.

By throwing the dead bodies off of the horses that bore them, he would have these as extra animals, should any fail in the long, hard race which he must make.

The scout saw that he could ride down the further side of the hill, gain the plain unseen, and thus gain a mile the start of the reds in the race for life.

They had drawn out of range, but would hold a council of war, and that would mean a quick surround of the hill, a state of siege, and then a wait until night for further action.

The outlaws had watched the fight with a frenzy of suspense. Not even Bob Brass dared put the scout to the test by calling out the true situation to the redskins.

They watched the crowding of the redskins up the steep, narrow, and rugged trail, and feared they would do just what they did, stampede under fire.

The scout's fusillade had been too deadly for them, and the outlaws had a feeling of deep disappointment when they saw the war party beaten back.

But, hope rose again when they knew that, with the night, the warriors would try again.

Yet there came this question: In the darkness and fury of the attack, could the Indians be kept from killing them?

In silence they watched the scout reload the rifles, but that he had made up his mind to some bold plan of action they quickly understood.

What could it be?

They saw him take the repeating rifles and fasten them to his saddle, and then untie the bodies from the horses to which they were securely bound; saw them laid in a row, the Indian with the three palefaces, and then beheld the scout tie the horses all together, as for a ride.

As he did so, his name was called, and into their midst bounded a white man!

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE PONY RIDER.

Every eye fell upon the man who came bounding into their presence.

He was small, smooth-faced, and youthful in appearance, while he was dressed in the garb of the Pony Express Riders of the Overland. In his belt he carried but one revolver to lighten his weight as much as possible.

"Pony Bob! By the Gods of war!" cried Buffalo Bill, with some show of excitement, and he grasped the hand of the Pony Rider, one of his warmest friends.

"Yes, Bill, old pard, but what the mischief does this queer outfit mean?"

"I'll tell you in a word, Bob.

"I corralled Bob Brass and a gang of outlaws known as Mounted Gold Miners, and some got killed, as you see, while a redskin also laid down and died from necessity.

"This man—too good looking for a road-agent, you will say—is the chief, and tried to rescue the gang, but run his head into the rope instead, while there, you see, is Corporal Dave Strong, whom I started out from the fort to run down.

"We were on our way to the fort, dead and all, but got jumped by redskins, beat them off once, and I am now about to light out with the party for a run of it, and will make a running fight, for if I stay here until night the reds will get me sure.

"Now you have the whole story in a nut-shell, so tell me which way you travel, and how did you get here?"

Instead of answering at once, Pony Bob looked over the outlaws, glanced at Bob Brass and King particularly, then

at the corporal, next at the dead, and said emphatically:

"Well, I'll be d—d!"

"Don't, Bob, for you are too good a fellow," replied Buffalo Bill, with a smile, while he still kept his eyes on the Indians herded together upon the plain.

"You deserve all the name you have won, Bill Cody, I have always said that; but if you don't get a Brigadier General's commission for this work, there is no gratitude in Governments.

"Why, Bill, pard, it is simply immense, away up in G, and its like was never done before."

"Never mind the taffy, Bob, for life is too short; but tell me what is your game just now."

"To admire your clean-cut grit!"

"You are on your run east, are you not?"

"I am."

"And—"

"I heard the firing, swooped around, found I could dash to the hill unseen, so did so, and my horse is at the base waiting for me, so I will report your fix at the fort and send help."

"I had decided to ride for it."

"Don't you do it, for there are other hounds of redskins between here and the fort. I am late, from dodging, and I thought the reds had the coach corralled here, so I wanted to find out and report."

"The coach is not due, Bob, for—"

"The schedule has been changed since you left the fort, Bill, and the coach is about due here now."

"Too bad."

"I will turn it back if it has not already been caught, so you had best stay right where you are."

"You are right, and I will."

"There are soldiers out, I know, and I may come upon some, and will send them, for I do not wish night to catch you here."

"Nor do I."

"Right you are."

"But you can kill the gang and get away alone, you know."

The outlaws shuddered. They did not relish Pony Bob's way of getting rid of them, should the scout find he had to leave them to make his own escape.

Buffalo Bill knew that Pony Bob was joking, and smilingly responded:

"Oh, yes; I could get rid of them by killing them, Bob, for there are just two revolver loads; but I had rather not, in fact, if it can be done, I shall take them all into the fort, so report me and my position to the colonel, and tell him how much I need help."

"I'll do it."

"Now, Pony Bob, you had best get out while you can do so unseen."

"I can do that, for I came up a ravine to the foot of the mound, and can return the same way, and you bet I'll ride for it as I never rode before, for I have not forgotten how many favors I owe you, Buffalo Bill, and that I go to save your life!"

"Thanks! And to help me rope in a dozen men who will be a curse to the country if they escape from me, for Corporal Strong is going to turn outlaw, and with that man King and Bob Brass, they will be three skillful and desperate leaders, as the people at the fort will find out if they get away."

"You are complimentary, Mr. Cody," said King, with a sinister smile.

"He's just preaching the truth, and I'll see what I can do to help hang you," Pony Bob replied, and with a grasp of the hand the scout held out to him he continued:

"Good-by, Pard Bill, and don't you forget it, but I believe you are going to get through all safe, after what you have already done."

"I'm off, and look for help as soon as I can get it here."

With this he bounded away down the further side of the hill, the way he had come, just as the redskin council of war broke up on the plain.

They had decided what they would do.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

WAITING.

The decision of the redskins had been anticipated by Buffalo Bill, who knew their methods thoroughly.

Brave as men can be, the Indian is yet cautious and cunning in all movements to better an enemy.

Those that had followed the scout and his prisoners to the mound had been repulsed in their first attack, and that called for a pow-wow.

It took time for braves so slow and dignified in council, and thus Pony Bob the Express Rider, had had time to visit the hill and learn the situation there with a fair show of soon getting help to the scout in his very terrible situation.

He had escaped by way of the ravine unseen, and was speeding away as rapidly as hoofs could carry him to seek help for Buffalo Bill.

Having decided just what they would do, and which the scout could have told them they would do an hour before, the redskins divided in two single-file columns.

These started to surround the hill, the columns dividing to join beyond the mound and thus completely invest it.

With great care to keep well out of range of the rifles, they moved on slowly, making signals to their comrades hiding under the rocky base of the hill, and when they met and made the circle complete they dismounted, staked out their ponies, and sat down with the patience displayed by Job to await their own time to move.

Buffalo Bill had quietly watched them, and knowing that it was long hours before night and wishing to rest both horses and men, he decided to dismount his prisoners, get dinner for them; and let the animals get what cropping they could from the grass on the hill-top.

He had decided also to bury the dead, as he had ample time, at least the white men and leave the redskin to his comrades to care for, well knowing they would dig him up and carry the body off for their own burial rites.

The men were accordingly dismounted one by one and made secure to a tree, save two of them, whose arms were freed and they were set to work with knives and the scout's hatchet to dig a grave for their comrades.

The scout meanwhile built a fire, got out his provisions and cooking outfit, and begun to prepare a meal for all hands.

The scout did not, however, neglect watching the redskins, to see that they made no sudden move, and he particularly kept his eyes upon the two outlaws digging the grave.

He well knew that with the knives and hatchet they could be dangerous if they cut the bonds off of their feet, and at least force him to kill them, for by a hard run of it they could bound down the hill and escape to the Indians.

The scout was not long in detecting that not only King, but Bob Brass and the corporal, were signaling to them to free themselves and make an attack on him, or a sudden bolt for liberty.

As his cooking kept him occupied he walked up to the two men, revolver in hand, and said in his decided way:

"If I see any move of you two men to cut your feet loose, I shall not give you warning, but drop you dead the moment I detect you in it."

"That is all I have to say."

He did not turn and walk away to the fire again, for none knew better than he how skillfully a knife could be thrown to kill, or a hatchet either.

Having gotten dinner ready he called the two men from their work on the grave to give their comrades their meals, freeing the hands of two men at a time, while he kept them covered with his revolvers.

It was a long and tedious task, but at last it was completed and then two others of the men were put to work upon the grave.

At last this, too, was finished, the bodies were wrapped in their blankets, and buried decently, after which rocks were piled upon the grave to keep the coyotes from digging them up.

This done, Buffalo Bill again bound the men securely to trees, and then with his glass made a careful reconnaissance of the Indian lines.

He had not been long at this work before he decided upon making a bold attempt to leave the mound.

Help might come in time, but he had to wait for Pony Bob to ride to the fort and then soldiers to come all the way back, he knew the Indians would make their attack long before assistance reached him.

With himself only to defend the hill in the night, the redskins could break in upon him easily under the cover of the darkness, and the end would quickly follow.

Examining the line he saw that the Indians were scattered, being a hundred feet apart at least.

As each side of the ravine by which Pony Bob had come and gone, the nearest redskin was fifty feet away.

To remain on the hill meant death, as it then appeared, while, by starting the moment it was dark, following the ravine, and pushing for the open plain, he could get upon the nearest redskins before they were discovered.

His rifle would quickly drop these, and then he would have a good start in the long race before the surprised Indians knew just what had happened.

"Yes, I will make the venture," he said in his determined way.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE SCOUT DECIDES UPON A PLAN.

The outlaws could see that the scout had decided upon some move, and they grew more anxious, for they knew that his bold expedients were many.

They were only hoping for night and the Indians to come.

That meant their freedom.

But they dreaded, from what they had heard Pony Bob say, that they would see the soldiers coming before nightfall.

That would banish all hope for them.

So, eagerly they watched the scout reconnoitering the Indian lines.

At last, as the suspense grew more and more hard to bear, they showed by their faces and restlessness just what they felt, save perhaps King and Bob Brass.

"You seem anxious," said Buffalo Bill.

"You are mistaken, for I am not at all so," replied King, with a sneer.

"Nor am I," Bob Brass remarked.

"You are fearful the soldiers will arrive before night."

"If they do not you are a dead dog," answered King.

"Perhaps."

"But the Indians never attack when they think their foe is awake, so they will await until midnight, or dawn."

"Then your doom is sealed."

"Yes, if I wait."

"But I have decided what I will do."

"What is that?"

"I am no longer hampered by the dead bodies, and as the horses can carry live weight much better, I shall leave here as soon as it is dark."

"Better not, for that means sure death to all of us."

"I see that I have hit upon the right thing to do by your not liking it."

"You can never break through the line, Buffalo Bill," said Bob Brass.

"Yes, you will get all of us shot," chimed in the corporal.

"It will certainly be preferable to hanging."

"But I take the same risks that you will, and I shall start at dark, and if I cannot break through then I will be surprised."

The outlaws looked at each other in a way that showed their opinion was the same as the scout's.

Unheeding them, he began his preparations for his night flight.

Each saddle and bridle was looked to,

and the lariats were looped so as to keep the horses a little over a length apart, while a short rein was to connect them two by two.

The leading horses were then to be attached by lariats to the horn of the scout's saddle, and thus arrayed he felt he could control the animals thoroughly and ride rapidly.

The horses nearest to him were to be those belonging to the dead outlaws, and these were to carry the weapons and the provisions and blankets, so as to make as equal a weight for all as was possible.

"That fellow is going to get through, Brass," said King, as he watched the scout at his work.

"Sure."

"And hang us all," said the corporal.

"That goes without saying," King rejoined.

"What he undertakes he'll do," remarked Bob Brass.

"I believe he will."

"But what is that he is doing now?"

At the query of King all watched the scout attentively.

He was cutting some small pieces of willow with his knife, trimming them in a peculiar shape, and tying thongs of buckskin around them, while pieces of dressed deerskin was put over one end.

"By Heaven, but they are gags!" cried Bob Brass.

"Gags!" echoed the rest of the party in chorus.

"Yes."

"He will thrust that buckskin padded end into our mouths and tie them there with the thongs at the back of our necks."

"My God!" gasped the corporal.

"I say, don't let him do it," remarked Bob Brass.

"What can we do?"

"Resist."

"It is easier to talk than to act."

"I will not open my mouth," one of the men ventured.

"Nor me."

"I won't."

"You bet I don't swallow that."

The determination of the outlaws not to be gagged was shown by other remarks, until King said dryly:

"A bowie knife will pry a mouth open very easily."

This was followed by silence, and all eyes watched Buffalo Bill as he went on making the gags.

"What are those?" called out Bob Brass as the scout finished his task.

"Gags."

"Do you intend to gag us?"

"Yes."

"Why so?"

"To keep you quiet."

"A threat to kill the man that calls out would be sufficient."

"Not at night, Brass."

"Why?"

"I could not tell who he was, and would not wish to make a mistake and kill the wrong man."

"That would be bad."

"Yes, and I have troubles enough as it is with you all."

"I do not like to be severe, nor cruel, but too much depends upon my getting you safely to the fort to take any chance."

"I intend to leave here just at dark, and I shall see that no man can give a warning to the Indians of what I am about."

"If I have to be cruel, you have only yourselves to blame for it."

"Now, I shall begin work, for it will take me more than an hour to get you all ready, and night is not very far off."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE TWO SENTINELS.

In every way in their power the outlaws tried to delay Buffalo Bill.

They asked for water, and one man claimed that the thongs were too tight for him to stand.

Another said he was very ill, while

still another suddenly fell forward in a faint.

Buffalo Bill heeded each complaint, carefully made an examination of the thongs, but when the man fainted, he drew his revolver and sent a bullet so very close to the fellow's head that he yelled lustily:

"Don't shoot me! I'm feeling better now!"

Even the man's comrades were forced to laugh at his sudden "coming to," while Buffalo Bill turned to see how the Indians regarded the shot.

It put them all upon the alert, but they did not more than to send a messenger entirely around the line with some word from the head chief.

The scout went quietly on with his preparations for his flight, and soon began to mount the outlaws.

One by one he led up their horses, watered the animals, gave the men a drink from a canteen, and then came the fateful words:

"You must be gagged now."

The first man he approached was the one who had asserted that he would not be gagged.

He savagely refused to open his mouth, and quietly drawing his bowie knife Buffalo Bill said:

"Shall I pry your mouth open with this?"

"I warn you that it will not be gentle work."

The man held out until the point of the blade was forced between his teeth, and then he opened his mouth with a yell that the Indians heard.

Instantly the gag was driven into his mouth, and the thongs about his neck secured it there firmly.

The man was then aided to mount his horse and his hands were tied to the saddle horn.

Thus each one was brought up by the scout, gagged, mounted, and bound to his saddle.

The horses were then fastened two by two, the lariat lines tied from the leaders to the rear animals, on each side, and the rein across held them in place.

Turning his glance, the scout again swept his eyes around the Indian line, and let them rest for some time upon the ravine through which he had to pass to safety.

It was just dark as he hung the repeating rifles of King and Bob Brass to his haddle horn, his own at his back, and mounted.

He had decided upon a desperate deed, yet not more so than would be remaining where he was, for the Indians to rush in upon him under cover of the night.

Even then those redskins who had been forced to take refuge among the rocks at the base of the hill might be preparing to creep upon him.

Throwing some wood upon the fire, to brighten it up, Buffalo Bill mounted and set off on his perilous undertaking, his horses in lead.

Down the steep hill they went, gained the ravine, and, passing along its bed, moved very slowly.

The bottom of the ravine was of sand and gave forth no sound of the hoof falls, the scout was glad to see.

He had once before left the mound by way of the ravine, when he went for a party of soldiers besieged there, but then had gone on foot.

Still, he knew well the way, and, could he pass the two redskins nearest the ravine, he felt that it then simply became a race for life, with the chances in favor of their horses against the Indian ponies.

On he went, through the ravine, until over half a mile had been gone over.

The ravine was broadening more and more and he knew it would so continue until it reached the stream, when it was not deep enough to hide the horses from view.

Suddenly he halted. All saw why he had done so.

Boldly relieved against the starlit sky, standing on the edge of the ravine, was a human form.

An Indian sentinel was there guarding the ravine.

The scout at once dismounted, crept on ahead, leaving his own horse to hold the others in position, and, rifle in hand, he got to where he could see that another redskin was on the edge of the ravine bank on the other side.

"I must get them both, but can I?"

"It will take quick shooting, but I will do my best."

"They both must be brought down if I expect to pass out here."

So mused the scout, and he stood in the dark ravine, looking up at the two forms relieved by the sky.

He knew that they had been placed there since the darkness had come on.

As he brought his rifle up to his shoulder, suddenly, afar back upon the mound he had left was heard a chorus of wild yells.

They were from Indian lips, and expressed mingled surprise, rage, and disappointment.

The scout knew but too well his flight had been discovered.

Instantly, as the two sentinels turned at the cries, he took aim, and quickly came a flash and sharp report.

A second shot followed within a second.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

FORCED TO ANOTHER REFUGE.

It was quick work, but Buffalo Bill was equal to it.

He brought one Indian down into the ravine dead, and the other fell wounded, and began his death song, after one loud cry of warning that the foe was upon him.

With great bounds Buffalo Bill ran back to his horses.

But there was trouble there.

The outlaws, by kicking the animals, had started them, and they were walking back toward the mound.

A cry from the scout, however, to his own horse, and the animal, leading as he did, turned the others back again, in spite of the wild kicking, writhing and hoarse sounds of the bound and gagged outlaws.

Then Buffalo Bill saw that he had done well in placing the gags into the mouths of his prisoners, as the yells they could otherwise have uttered would have stampeded all the horses, his own with the rest, and he would have been left alone and on foot in the ravine with many chances against him of ever escaping.

With a few rapid bounds the scout reached the horses, threw himself into his saddle, and at once dashed ahead in flight.

One thing had pleased him, for had the Indians been near the ravine they would ere that have been where they could fire down upon him.

They had doubtless all been drawing in toward the hill, intending to attack on foot as soon as darkness came, expecting that aid would soon arrive for the besieged party.

The wisdom of Buffalo Bill's flight was at once apparent to him, and to the outlaws, to their great regret, however.

Down the ravine dashed the scout, and reaching the stream he plunged boldly in and the lariat horses were soon on the other side.

Did he push right on for the fort by the trail, Buffalo Bill knew that he would be followed, so he wheeled in the darkness up the bank of the stream, just as he heard the yells of his foes, and the clatter of their ponies upon the plain, half a mile away.

They were mounting in hot haste to pursue him.

Half a mile up the stream he rode again into it and recrossed.

Halting to listen, he heard the splashing of the water as the redskins went across where he had done so, and pushed on in pursuit of him, as they supposed.

In the darkness they could not follow even the wet trail he had left he well knew, so they would push on in the direc-

tion they felt that he would take to reach the fort.

Once across the stream, Buffalo Bill kept on through the timber at a walk, and the outlaws were dismayed to find that his cunning had been more than a match for the redskins, for certainly they had lost the scout in the darkness and were riding away on a false trail.

In a fury they gnawed at their gags, but were powerless to do more.

Feeling that he had certainly eluded his enemies, Buffalo Bill decided to go to a mountain spur that overlooked the mound where he had taken refuge, and distant from it only a few miles.

If aid came to the mound he could attract attention from the spur by firing several shots and show where he was.

He did not dare, with the prisoners in lead as they were, attempt to strike for the fort then in the darkness, as he knew the Indians were scattered along his way, and he would be liable to run upon them at any time.

By going to the spur he would be in call of the mound, whither Pony Bob was to send aid.

Then, too, the climb up the spur was by a narrow, steep, and winding path, the only way of getting up there, and he could keep at bay, single-handed, any number of redskins.

Once before he had taken refuge there and had had proof of that fact.

There was no water there, no wood to cook food, but the canteens could be filled and the party would have to live on dry crackers until rescued.

His mind being made up, he at once filled the canteens and then, remounting, turned his horse toward the spur.

There was no hurry, and he went slowly and with great caution.

After an hour's ride he reached the spur at the end of the range, and rode along until he came to the trail.

In years gone by the spur had evidently been the home of that strange race of Indians known as the "Cliff Dwellers," for ruins of their homes were still there.

Placing the horses now in single file, after watering them all at a spring at the base of the spur, he led the way up the trail, and at last reached the summit of the cliff.

There were boulders there to hide them from view, and a few scrub pines that might serve for fuel if necessary, but otherwise the cliff was bare.

The boulders concealed the horses and prisoners, and the scout knew that he could defend the cliff, so could ask no more, though he realized that both himself and his captives must suffer greatly if their rescuers were delayed in reaching them.

Still, nothing else could be done, and he made the best of it.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE TEMPTATION.

Buffalo Bill had his pride aroused, after all he had gone through with, to save the prisoners from capture by the Indians and take them in safety to the fort.

He even hoped rescue would not come, and the next night he would be able to go through alone with his captives, thus winning the honor of doing all unaided.

He knew thoroughly well that the cliff was perfectly safe, should he be attacked, for it would take a very large force of Indians to dislodge him.

The Cliff Dwellers of long ago had arranged for this, and the top of the barren spur was only to be approached by way of the trail.

This trail was under command of his rifle for over a quarter of a mile of its ascent, and so narrow that not over a couple of Indians could come up abreast.

If they attempted to come up he could readily pick them off, while not even their firearms, mostly muskets, could reach him.

The only thing was, he well knew, that the horses could not get a blade of grass there, nor water, so he could be starved

out in a short while, for he had provisions only for a couple of days.

Arranging the horses among the boulders, he dismounted the prisoners, spread their blankets for them and tied them all together with lariats.

Then he took several blankets, mounted his horse, and rode back down the trail.

He knew the grass was long and rich in the valley, and he determined to cut sufficient to at least give the horses a mouthful now and then.

Every canteen was taken also to the spring and filled with the cool water that flowed from it, and when the scout returned to the cliff he felt that he could at least stand a siege of several days if driven to it.

Utterly worn out by his loss of rest and hardships of the last two days, he spread his blankets and went at once into a deep sleep, placing his own horse on guard on the trail, for he knew his faithful guard would warn him of danger, if he had been seen by the redskins to retreat to the cliff.

"If I can only get these men to the fort, it will be the great act of my life," was the thought constantly in his mind.

The rising sun, casting a ray into his face, awakened him, and he sprang to his feet with a start.

"Well, I have had at least half a dozen hours of sleep, and that, to me, means a great deal," he muttered as he looked about him.

There was his horse down the trail, waiting where he had placed him, and he first called him up to the cliff and gave him a canteen of water and small bundle of the grass he had cut the night before.

"Your strength must be kept up, old pard," he said.

His prisoners were just as he had left them the night before.

He had removed the gags when he had arrived upon the cliff, and at once proceeded to make the men more comfortable.

But, altogether, they were a very haggard and wretched looking set of men.

Their hands were swollen, also their feet, from the binding of the thongs, and they really suffered.

To all the scout gave a few swallows from the canteen and said:

"We dare not build a fire, men, so you will have to go on crackers until I get where I can cook something for you.

"I have looked over the valley, and there are redskins now at the mound, but I am sure they do not suspect our presence here."

"I only wish that they did," said King.

"It would do little good, for they could not come up here against my single rifle, and it would only cause me to kill them uselessly.

"No, there has been killing enough for one trip."

"And yet, merciful to the Indians, you wish to see us hanged."

"No, corporal, I do not wish to see you hanged, but you have all broken the law, and duty forces me to take you to the fort."

"Say, Buffalo Bill, I wish to have a talk with you, apart from the others here," said King.

"All right; after you have all had your breakfast of bread and water, I will hear what you have to say," was the answer.

Half an hour after, King was led apart from the others, and, seated among the boulders, Buffalo Bill asked:

"Now, Mr. King, I'll hear what you have to say."

"Well, I'll come right to the point."

"It is the best way."

"As a chief of scouts your pay is not very large?"

"Not very."

"If you, one man, allowed two of us, all desperate men, with the gallows before our faces, to escape, no one would wonder at it."

"No, the wonder would be that one

man could capture and take to the fort ten men.

"That is just it, and I wish to say to you that it is in my power to pay you a large sum of money if you allow us to escape."

"Yes."

"You can alter my bonds so that I can get them free, and while you are sleeping, and you sadly need rest, I can free the others and escape."

"I see."

"Then we can go our way and you go yours."

"Well."

"You have a good heart, and do not care to see us hang."

"No."

"Well, do as I ask you, and you shall have a clean ten thousand dollars, one thousand for each man."

"Where is the money?"

"I have it with me."

"You have it?"

"Yes, and more; but ten thousand is all I will give."

"Let me see the color of your money."

The man thrust his hand into a concealed pocket of his shirt, and drew out a leather wallet.

It was full of greenbacks, and of large denominations.

"You have it, I see! but money never tempted me to commit a crime, and such it would be to turn you and your gang loose to kill and rob."

"No, King, I am a poor man, but I believe I am honest, and am not for sale."

"I am sorry for you, but I cannot help you."

"You must take the consequences of your evil lives."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE CAMP.

Pony Bob was as true as steel to his old comrade, Buffalo Bill.

Never in all his wild rides on the Pony Express did he dash along as he did on the race to rescue the scout, and save the prisoners he had in his keeping.

As he sped along he saw a cloud of smoke ahead of him.

He knew at once what it meant.

Experience had told him what to expect.

He was sure that it was the relay station on fire.

The Indians had attacked the stock herders, run off the horses kept there for the stages and Pony Express riders, and doubtless the two men had been killed or captured.

Pony Bob dare not go there, so must flank it and dash on to the next relay station.

It necessitated a further ride of twenty miles and he had already pushed his horse desperately hard.

But no mercy was shown to horses in those days of the Pony Express.

Turning from the Overland Trail, on he flew.

His good horse was kept at a full limit of speed, the spurs in his flanks keeping him up to it.

On, on he dashed.

Night had not yet come on, and he looked eagerly ahead to see if there was another cloud of smoke, telling of the burning of the next station.

If that also was deserted a hard time indeed would he have of it to continue on to the next with his tired horse.

At last he turned again into the Overland Trail, and he could barely refrain from a shout as he discovered no fresh traces of Indians having gone that way.

The other station he felt was safe.

He arrived there with his horse staggering, and the animal dropped dead as he leaped from his back.

"Pards, the station behind is gone, burned up by redskins, and what the fate of the boys is I do not know."

"I flanked it and pushed for you; but, thank God, you are all right," he said as the two stock tenders came out to meet him.

"Yes. Know'd those reds was a huntin' scalps, Bob, and so we turned the coach back to the fort with the news.

"How you got through there God only knows, and poor Buffalo Bill is right up among 'em somewhar and alone, for he passed several days ago a chasin' of Corporal Dave Strong, who had been doin' some killin' at the fort."

"Yes, I am now riding to send soldiers to help Buffalo Bill.

"I'll tell you about him as I eat my grub, and I want the very best horse in your outfit," answered Pony Bob.

Supper was ready for him, and one of the men helped him to it, while the other went to get another horse than the one they had all ready, for Pony Bob's request was to secure an animal noted for his speed and endurance.

"We has the critters all in the corral, and ef ther Injuns comes, we'll give 'em a hard fight of it.

"But I guess they surprised the boys back at t'other station."

"I fear so," and then Pony Bob told of Buffalo Bill and his wonderful achievements, and the two men gave a cheer.

"Just like Bill!" said one.

"You bet."

"He gits thar every time!"

"'Deed he does."

"Ride like a mad one, Bob, and git the soldiers along, and maybe yer'll save our scalps, too."

"I'll do it, pard."

"Look out for yourselves," and Pony Bob threw himself into his saddle and was off like an arrow.

The two men watched him until he was out of sight up the trail, commented upon his grit, and then began to talk of Buffalo Bill and his great haul of prisoners.

On and on went Pony Bob, the darkness of night being no barrier to his speed.

His horse had traveled that trail in full flight many a time, and in the darkest of nights, so Bob gave him his rein and the spur too.

The next station was reached in wonderfully fast time, an exchange of horses was made, and so on flew the brave Pony Rider, sparing neither himself nor the horses he rode.

He had but one aim in view, and that was to get aid to Buffalo Bill as soon as possible.

Suddenly he beheld a light ahead; then another.

It was a camp-fire.

"Soldiers!" he shouted, as he caught sight of a camp and half a dozen men in uniform.

Turning from the trail he dashed up to the camp and called out:

"I am Pony Bob, the Express Rider

"Who commands here?"

"Ho, Bob! Anything wrong?" and Lieutenant Walter Winter, a young cavalry officer, came forward.

"Yes, sir; all goes wrong, for Buffalo Bill is corralled at Mounment Mound by a hundred Indians and there are more about there, while the Brook Spur relay station has been burned, and I flanked it."

"Buffalo Bill corralled, and alone, Bob?"

"Worse than alone, sir, for he has ten prisoners with him."

"Ten prisoners?"

"Yes, lieutenant; nine outlaws of the Mounted Gold Miners' band, and Corporal Dave Strong."

"Ha! He captured Strong, then?"

"Yes, sir; got him O. K., and nine more with him."

"I tell you it is, immense, for he has also got three dead outlaws and a dead Injun along, too—it's the biggest haul of Buffalo Bill's life, lieutenant."

"I should think so; but how did he capture them?"

"Yanked them all in, but I'll have to let him tell the story when you see him."

"And he's at Monument Mound, or Tombstone, you say?"

"Yes, sir; corralled there, and he beat off one attack, for he's got an arsenal to fight 'em with."

"I am just now in search of Buffalo Bill, Pony Bob, for this gentleman here

is on a hunt for a party of lost miners, as it were, the Gold Dust Jim outfit, and Colonel Hughlet sent me out to find the Chief of Scouts and let him go on as guide for him," said Lieutenant Winter, referring to a gentleman who just then came up, and who was a tenderfoot on the plains, as a glance revealed.

CHAPTER XL.

THE RIDE TO THE RESCUE.

The stranger spoke pleasantly to Pony Bob, and the latter saw in him a well-knit form, fine, daring face, calm manner, and decided that, after all, whoever the civilian said he was, he looked to be every inch a man.

"If he'd only shoot the derby hat for a slouch, and put on a border suit instead of store clothes, I guess he'd be one to tie to," was Bob's mental decision of the stranger.

"The colonel wished to find Cody, and if he had captured Corporal Strong, to bring the latter back to the fort, while he went on in search of the Gold Dust Jim outfit with Mr. Rupert Rockwell here, who is from the East, Bob."

Pony Bob decided that the Lieutenant's last bit of information was unneeded, as he could see that the gentleman was not from the West.

But he made no comment on this fact, and said:

"Well, sir, you'll find Buffalo Bill at the Tombstone Mound, as I said, and he needs your help bad."

"May I ask how many men you have, sir?"

"We are nine all told."

"Enough to give the Indians a scare, sir, and to cut through their line into the Mound, while I suppose you wish to have me take word to Colonel Hughlet."

"Yes, indeed, for if the Indians are in the numbers you report, we will need a large force sent out, and lose no time about it, either."

"I will go on at once to Buffalo Bill's aid, and you can report to Colonel Hughlet what I have done, and tell him all that you know as to the movements and doings of the Indians."

"I will, sir."

"And, Bob, urge the importance of not a minute of delay, for the troopers cannot arrive any too soon, and by the hardest riding they will not reach us before late to-morrow night."

"I am off, sir," and with a bound Pony Bob threw himself into his saddle again and was away at full speed.

Looking back as he got well away from the camp, he saw the troopers hastening to saddle up for the ride of rescue.

On like the wind rode Pony Bob, and after passing two more relay stations and getting fresh mounts he drew near the fort.

The stock tenders told him that the party under Lieutenant Winter must have taken the lower trail, not to have met the returning coach, and, as it had reached the fort, doubtless before that time, Colonel Hughlet would have a force of cavalry even then on the way to meet the Indians.

As he drew near the fort, Pony Bob saw a dark mass ahead of him on the plain.

He drew quickly to a halt and heard the tread of half a hundred horses, along with the clanking of sabres and jingling of accoutrements.

"Good! A troop of cavalry is already on the march," he cried, and a moment after he drew rein and up came three scouts, followed by an officer and a troop of cavalry.

"Captain Sands, I have to make a report, sir," he cried, and quickly his story was told.

"Good for you, Pony Bob, and bravo for Buffalo Bill."

"Lieutenant Winter will rescue Cody and his prisoners doubtless, but get into a trap himself, so I will push ahead to the aid of all."

"But there are more Indians on the war trail than Colonel Hughlet had any

idea there were, from what you tell me, so ask him to please send after me a couple of light guns and two troops of cavalry, with what reserve force he deems best, for we had better be fully prepared, and it is well to have too many men than not enough."

"I will tell him, sir," and with a salute Pony Bob was again off at a full run, while he saw that the cavalrymen at once had quickened their pace.

"They'll get there, and dear old Bill will come out O. K." he said as he sped along.

Half an hour more and he dashed into the fort and first rode to headquarters.

The colonel had retired for the night, but told the orderly to admit the Pony Rider and he too heard the story of Buffalo Bill's brave capture of the outlaws and the corporal, and the danger the scout was then in.

Colonel Hughlet sprang from his bed in a hurry, sent the orderly for his adjutant, and rapidly dressed as the Pony Rider talked.

"I will send force enough, for this is serious, and Cody must be rescued at all hazards," cried Colonel Hughlet, and then he complimented Pony Bob upon what he had done.

The adjutant now arrived, other officers were sent for, and just one hour after the arrival of Pony Bob, the troopers were off to the rescue.

CHAPTER XLI.

A RAY OF HOPE.

King, the outlaw, felt that he had played his last card for escape, when Buffalo Bill could not be tempted by the large price he had offered for the freedom of himself and companions.

"Strange, very strange," he muttered.

"That man is poor, and yet a small fortune does not tempt him to let us go, when few other men would not hesitate a moment but accept."

"There is indeed much in Buffalo Bill, and I do not wonder at the success he has won."

"He will yet make a great name for himself if he is not killed, and the chances are that he will not live long out in this wild land, for too many men wish him dead."

"Well, there is no chance for us now unless the Indians deliberately attack and carry this position, and it is much easier to defend than was the Tombstone Mound yonder."

"It looks very dark for us just now."

While King was musing, Buffalo Bill stood near gazing through his glass down the valley and also sweeping the surroundings of the Tombstone Mound.

He had discovered that the Indians were encamped there, and in larger force than on the day before.

Some other band had joined them.

"If Pony Bob got through all right, and he is the one to make the ride if any one can, I should see the cavalry putting in an appearance about sunset."

"If he did not make the ride in safety, and I admit the chances are against him by a large majority, then I must stand a starvation siege up here for I do not know how long."

"Fortunately, I have plenty of food for the rifles, if not for the outlaws and myself."

"I must rig some signal to let the soldiers know my whereabouts, should they come in sight."

With this he led King back to where the other prisoners were, and securing him once more, said, in a kindly way:

"I am sorry for you, pard, but then duty makes us do many a thing that is painful to our feelings."

"I wish your feelings were painful enough to cause you to release me, Buffalo Bill," said Bob Brass.

"I am not suffering quite that much," was the scout's remark, and he set to work to find material for a signal.

He had taken from the Indian he had killed a new and brilliant red blanket, and one of the outlaws had a bright blue one, he had observed.

"These will do, and there is certainly enough white material in the outfit to get a third banner.

"It will be the red, white, and blue, and will catch the eye of the soldiers, and they will know that the signal does not come from Indians."

In a little while he had strung on a lariat his red and blue blankets, and a white cloth, and found two scrub pines he could tie them between at a height of some dozen feet from the ground.

One end was made fast, and the other passed over a limb of the tree, ready to draw the line taut and display the signal at the proper time.

Thus far, in spite of the scout moving about the cliff, and climbing the two trees with the line, the Indians had not yet discovered their presence there.

Buffalo Bill made no attempt to hide himself, for he knew if the Indians came to the attack that would attract the attention of the soldiers on their coming into the valley, should the signals not do so, while otherwise they would push right on to the Tombstone Mound.

As the day wore on, both men and horses began to feel the need of food.

The men had their canteens, but they were compelled to draw upon them with great economy.

The horses had no water, and only a mouthful of grass the scout gave them from time to time.

"I will raise my signal, for fighting Indians off is better than this slow work," said Buffalo Bill.

So up he pulled the signal, and almost immediately he saw that it was discovered by the redskins about Tombstone Mound.

There was much excitement visible among them, riding to and fro, and in a short while a mounted force of a hundred braves moved at a gallop toward the cliff.

"Now we have another chance," said Bob Brass.

"Yes, they must take this cliff now, or we will never escape," the corporal said.

"This position is more easily defended than was the Monument Hill yonder, and that man will beat them back," remarked King.

"We might hail them, for he has forgotten to gag us," said Bob Brass.

"Yes, if they knew we were prisoners, that they did not have to fight us, but one man, and that man Buffalo Bill, for whose scalp they would sacrifice a hundred warriors, then I believe they would take the cliff at all hazards," said King.

"I will call out to them in their own tongue as soon as they get near enough," responded Bob Brass.

"Good! See, Buffalo Bill is taking his position to command the trail, and looking to his weapons."

"And has forgotten to gag us," added the corporal, with great glee at the thought, while a cheerful look of hope stole over each outlaw's face now.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE SHOT OF WARNING.

The hope of the outlaws was short-lived.

Buffalo Bill was not a man to forget when life depended upon remembering anything.

He was first looking to his weapons, and getting them in readiness, and right where they would be at hand when needed.

Then, too, he was preparing a defense should the Indians get well up the trail.

A couple of large rocks, which the outlaws thought beyond his power to move, he with apparently no great exertion rolled to the edge of the cliff where the trail came up.

Smaller ones were added to these, and the scout had a good breastwork built with not much trouble.

Then he walked over toward the outlaws, the Indians being but a quarter of a mile away, and coming in a walk.

The hearts of the prisoners sunk with dread.

Had he remembered that he had not gagged them.

They were so placed that they could see the Indians over the edge of the cliff.

The scout was determined that the Indians should see them.

"Men, get up," he said.

"We can't walk."

"I did not ask you to do so, Bob Brass."

"Get up!"

"What for?"

"Because I wish it."

"I feel too bad, and for one I won't," said Bob Brass.

"I see you object."

"What is it?"

"You wish to powwow until the Indians get within hearing, and then call out to them."

"Never thought of it."

"Get up, I tell you, all of you."

"Pards, don't do it."

The men were in an ugly mood, and Buffalo Bill realized it.

He calmly drew a revolver in each hand and said very quietly:

"You know that I make no idle threats.

"I have not put the gags in your mouths, for it is cruel, and I do not like to do so.

"I prefer to treat you as mercifully as I can, but you will not allow me to do so.

"Now, I tell you again that the man that utters a cry to those Indians I shall kill.

"If I do not know which one did so I shall turn and fire half a dozen shots upon your gang, and fire to kill, too.

"You know the alternative, so act as you deem best.

"Now, I have told you to rise, and you refuse.

"I have my revolvers in hand, and mark my words, the man that remains seated, or the men, after I give the order to rise, gets a bullet through his right ear, as my special brand.

"Do you understand?"

Not a word was said in reply, but Buffalo Bill read that the words he had uttered had their effect.

"I shall order you to rise, and count one, two, three—the man that does not obey gets my bullet brand in his ear."

The men were still silent. Their faces were deadly pale.

They glanced at each other, and especially toward King.

The Indians were drawing dangerously near, yet Buffalo Bill seemed not to heed the fact.

"Attention, men!"

"One! two! three! rise!"

As one ran the outlaws scrambled to their feet, as best they could, bound hands and feet.

Buffalo Bill then turned toward the Indians, and gave his wild warcry, which was so dreaded and well known among the tribes of the northwest.

The Indians halted for a moment, looked searchingly upward, and returned an answering cry of defiance.

But they saw the scout and the outlaws.

It was to show his pretended force that Buffalo Bill had made them rise.

He had driven the prisoners to obey him, thus gaining his point.

"They see eleven of us, pards, and not knowing you are prisoners, the moral effect of numbers is great for me.

"Remember what I told you about uttering a cry.

"There is a way of escape from this cliff that I know of, and I can take alone, though I could not lead bound men that trail, nor could I take my horse.

"If driven to it, I will take that trail, and alone.

"That means that the Indians would find ten dead men here, and not catch Buffalo Bill.

"Don't drive me to killing you."

The men saw that the man held the

power to do as he threatened, and from King to the meanest wretch of the gang they were subdued thoroughly.

Leaving them, the scout walked to his barrier, and picked up his own trusty rifle.

He knew what it could do.

Not caring to kill, he wished to call a halt where the Indians then were.

He hoped that it would prevent the sacrifice of the lives of many braves.

The chief of the band he noted through his glass, was a young man, large, and bedecked in a most gorgeous costume.

He was mounted upon a fine American horse, as white as snow.

Taking deliberate aim at the head of the white animal, Buffalo Bill pulled trigger.

It was a long range shot, a shot of warning, and it was an unerring one.

The white horse dropped dead beneath his gorgeously bedecked rider.

CHAPTER XLIII.

A GALLANT BAND.

The deadly aim of Buffalo Bill brought the band of Indians to a sudden halt.

The white horse was dead, and the young chief was pinioned beneath his weight, so suddenly had he fallen.

Warriors quickly dismounted and drew him from beneath the dead horse, while one brave led forward an extra animal and the saddle and bridle of the chief was put on him.

The chief was slightly hurt only, and mounted quickly.

But the band had come to a halt.

That remarkable rifle had taught them a lesson.

If it could kill a horse at that distance, how much more easily it would sound the death knell of a brave.

Of course the Indians supposed that the chief, and not his horse, had been aimed at.

But they looked to their leader for orders.

They were yet several hundred yards from the base of the cliff.

Then it was a further climb, by a narrow, zigzag trail up to the cliff, and all the while under the fire of, as they supposed, a dozen palefaces.

The chances looked desperate.

They called for a pow-wow. They must talk it over, and to do this a safer distance was necessary.

They turned to ride back out of range of that terrible rifle.

What they then decided upon they would do, or at least attempt.

But as they turned they saw the tall form of their dreaded foe appear upon the very edge of the cliff.

They all knew Buffalo Bill by sight.

There was no mistaking that magnificent form.

But what was he doing?

Actually waving his sombrero round and round his head.

Was it a signal to them?

If so they did not understand it.

They halted for a moment in their backward march, and then they saw him put his field glasses to his face.

"Far-look eyes," they called the field glasses.

The scout had them to his eyes and was looking down the valley.

What he saw the redskins also saw.

Buffalo Bill's "far-look eyes" were turned upon a party of soldiers just entering the lower end of the valley.

They were four miles away at least.

The band of Indians had some three miles to ride to reach the Tombstone Mound, where the remainder of their force was.

They lost no time in starting to join them.

In fact, they went off as one man, and in a sweeping run, while they uttered cries of wild disappointment and rage.

Of course they supposed that the soldiers were the advance guard of a large force.

Buffalo Bill had the same idea, and called out to his prisoners, with excusable exultation:

"Pards, I have won the game without a trump."

"The troopers are entering the valley." The prisoners groaned in agony of spirit.

A moment after Buffalo Bill said:

"No, I did have a trump card, and it was well played—I refer to Pony Bob."

The prisoners said nothing.

From where they were they could not see the soldiers, but they could see the redskins going in a run toward Tombstone Mound.

They were anxious to rally there with their comrades and beat back the pale-face soldiers.

Buffalo Bill kept his eyes fixed upon the soldiers.

His face was a study, for he had made some discovery.

What he saw seemed to puzzle him.

"That is the boldest advance guard I ever saw in the face of a foe so numerous," he muttered.

"There must be a large force waiting in the timber at the end of the valley, though my glass does not show any."

"Why, there is only a couple of scouts, an officer, a man in civilian attire, and half a dozen soldiers, with several pack horses."

"I cannot understand it, for if there was a force behind them they would have left their pack horses there, and the man in citizen's dress also."

"Ah! they have seen my signal and are coming here."

"I only hope that others will come in sight, to keep the Indians off of them, for were those redskins to turn they could head them before they reached the cliff."

Thus musing and watching, Buffalo Bill saw the little band of half a score come flying along.

As they drew nearer he cried:

"I recognize the scouts as two of my best men, and Lieutenant Walter Winston is the commander."

"He always was a reckless devil-may-care fellow, and is certainly taking his life in his hands now, and the life of each one with him."

"Their horses are jaded, too, but they are putting the spurs to them hard—ah! the Indians have halted, seeing that they have no support, and the band is coming back to cut them off."

"Now, ride for it, men, ride for your lives!" shouted Buffalo Bill.

But his voice could not reach half the distance to the gallant little band.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE RIDE FOR THE CLIFF.

"Men, those redskins have Buffalo Bill besieged in Tombstone Mound, and we must make a bold bluff to drive them off."

So said Lieutenant Walter Winston, when he came in sight of the Tombstone Mound, and saw the Indians encamped about it.

Not expecting any force from the fort, and with scouting bands scattered all about, the Indians had placed no guard at the entrance to the valley.

The small party under Lieutenant Winston was not seen by them either until they had gotten well into the valley.

The young officer knew that when seen, he would be taken for the advance guard of a large force, and hence depended upon this to put the Indians to flight.

That was the bold play he intended to make to rescue Buffalo Bill.

But he was discovered first by the redskins about Tombstone Mound, and just then one of the scouts said:

"Look at the cliff, sir, up the valley to our left—there is a signal flying on the top!"

"You are right."

"What can it mean?"

"It is no Indian signal, sir, but red, white, and blue."

"Doubtless a party of troopers corraled there."

"Yes, sir."

"Then we will hold on boldly, as though we were followed by a large

force, and make a dash for the cliff for safety, for of course we cannot reach the Tombstone Mound through that large band."

"No, sir, but do you see the band of mounted Indians riding at full speed across the valley toward the mound?"

"Yes, that timber hid them before."

"They seem to be coming from the cliff."

"Yes, sir, and discovered us, so are riding to join their comrades about the mound."

"There are enough Indians about Tombstone to eat us up."

"Yes, indeed, sir, and there must be more, for they are forming to make a fight, though they must believe we have a large force of soldiers near."

"They do not wish to give up their game, lieutenant."

"No; but we will ride directly for the cliff."

"Do you see any one upon it?"

"No, sir."

One of the scouts then halted his horse, and asking for the lieutenant's glass, took a long survey of the cliff.

The others rode on meanwhile at a gallop.

Soon he was heard to shout to them, and he came on as rapidly as he could urge his horse.

"Ride, for it, sir, for that is Chief Cody upon the cliff, as sure as I am a living man!" he shouted.

"But Buffalo Bill was corraled in Tombstone Mound, Pony Bob said."

"I know, sir, but he's on yonder cliff now."

"Ride on, while I take a look."

The officer halted and put his glass to his eyes.

But only for an instant, for loudly he shouted as he came dashing on:

"You are right, Ball!"

"It is Buffalo Bill."

"How did he get there, sir?" asked the other scout, as the officer rode up.

"I do not know."

"It is one of the mysteries that Buffalo Bill is constantly making."

"He must indeed be a remarkable man," said Rupert Rockwell, the man from the East.

"Yes, and you find him one to tie to in all things, before your trail with him is ended," was Walter Winston's complimentary comment upon the scout.

"They are coming back, sir, to head us off!"

It was Scout Ball who gave the warning cry, and he pointed to the Indians, who were returning, as he said, to cut them off before they could reach the cliff.

"Ride for your lives, all!" shouted Walter Winston, and every man settled himself in his saddle for the ride for life.

"Two of you men get behind those pack horses and push them hard."

"If they hang back leave them!" ordered Lieutenant Winston.

The order was obeyed, and the little cavalcade went sweeping along, driving spurs deep into their horses.

Each man saw his danger, and noted well the distance they had to ride to the cliff, and the distance the Indians had to come to head them off.

"It is chances even for us," said Winston coolly.

And on the party flew, the pack horses being well driven up with the others.

But the Indians were now urging their horses at full speed.

They realized apparently that the advance guard of the soldiers was far ahead of the main force.

Determined to cut the little party off and wipe them out, before the expected force could come up, they rode like the wind.

If the advance guard reached the cliff trail, the Indians knew that they were safe, for they supposed that the men on the cliff would open a deadly fire to support their climb up the trail.

It thus became a question of life and death for the little party.

Lieutenant Winston and all with him realized this fact.

"Don't falter, men!"

"Keep your horses well in hand and drive your spurs deep," came in the cool voice of the gallant young officer.

"There stands Buffalo Bill, rifle in hand, and he will support us," he said a moment after, and added:

"Now, Mr. Rockwell, you will be able to see the greatest of bordermen in action, and it will be a revelation to you."

"I shall be glad to see him, for I am strangely drawn toward the man, from all you say of him," replied Rupert Rockwell.

So on the little party flew, and on the Indians came.

To the coolly calculating eyes of the young officer it seemed that as he reached the base of the cliff the Indians would be upon them.

To prevent this he decided to strike a blow that would be felt by the redskins.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE DEAD SHOT SCOUT.

"Men, we will have to fight for it."

"Get your carbines ready, soldiers."

Lieutenant Winston spoke calmly, yet decidedly.

He had determined to push the pack horses ahead with Mr. Rockwell, have the two scouts guard them, while he halted and delivered a fire in the face of the coming Indians with his half dozen cavalymen.

But just here arose a question, for Rupert Rockwell, armed with a splendid repeating rifle, and a man who had shown to all that he knew no such word as fear, replied to the lieutenant's order for him to go to the front with the pack animals and scouts:

"I am not one to be protected, Lieutenant Winston, at the risk of others."

"I will fire with your men, sir."

"And our two rifles, lieutenant, count for something, for they are both repeaters," said Scout Ball.

"All right, it adds to our fire in weight."

"We will halt when I deem it best, and deliver our fire along their line, and then dash on," answered the officer, glad to see how thoroughly he could depend upon those with him.

They were yet half a mile from the cliff, and the Indians were an equal distance.

There on the dizzy height, watching the race for life, stood Buffalo Bill, surveying the scene with the calmness of one who had become inured to deeds of death, yet ready to chip in when he felt that he could be of any service.

Lieutenant Winston had his eyes alternately upon the scout and the Indians.

He seemed to have firm confidence in the scout's ability to aid them in some way, alone though he was, and with a number of prisoners upon his hands, for he supposed that he still had his outlaw captives with him.

Then, as he could not see the prisoners, he had an idea that the scout had been able only to make his escape alone from the Tombstone Mound, and so said to Scout Ball.

"It looks that way, sir, indeed," said the scout.

Then all saw Buffalo Bill take off his broad sombrero, and wave it around his head, as a means of encouragement to the little band of flyers.

They answered with a cheer as they ran, and instantly followed the scout's wild war cry.

This the coming redskins replied to with mad yells, as they urged their ponies on.

Back about Tombstone Mound were now seen several hundred mounted braves, ranged in line of battle.

They were showing their force, having come down from the Mound, and Buffalo Bill, seeing them, muttered:

"I only hope troops enough have been sent out to meet them."

"If not, there will be right here in this valley."

And Lieutenant Winston, as he glanced toward Tombstone and beheld the large force, said:

"All told, they are half a thousand at least."

"I hope that the colonel has sent men enough to meet them successfully."

"He doubtless has," replied Rupert Rockwell, to whom the officer had spoken.

Another moment, and when within a quarter of a mile of the cliff, the lieutenant shouted:

"Attention!"

"Wheel into line and halt!"

"Ready, aim, fire!"

Ten rifles flashed together, the men having obeyed the order well, and wheeled to the right into line, Lieutenant Winston also carrying a repeating rifle slung to his saddle, for he was fond of hunting.

The ten bullets met the charging Indians full in the face, and ponies and braves went down.

Momentarily the redskins were checked, just long enough for their foes to get again on the run, the soldiers reloading their carbines as they sped along.

"Well done, men!"

"We will give them another volley as we reach the cliff, and empty the repeating rifles then," cried Winston.

His men answered with a cheer, and the Indians were yelling in wild rage at their loss, while they begun to fire also, those who had firearms, though their weapons were not of long range and did no harm.

As they neared the cliff a loud voice rang out, as though coming from the clouds:

"The trail leads up between those two large rocks."

"Fire as you reach them, and then climb on foot, leading your horses."

"I will do what I can to beat them back!"

"Ay, ay, Cody."

"Three cheers for Buffalo Bill!" shouted the lieutenant.

The cheer was given with a will, as the party dashed on, and all knew that a few moments more would tell the story.

They were within a couple of hundred yards of the cliff, the redskins about one-half more that distance away, and ten to one against them, matters certainly looked dubious as to their escape.

But there was no flinching in that brave band of heroes.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE HERO OF THE CLIFF.

The faces of the men who were riding for their lives were flushed with excitement, yet stern and determined.

Their lives were in their hands, their destiny would be known within five minutes more.

Driven to their full strength and speed, the nostrils of their horses were red as blood, their hides dripping wet, and they were panting like hard-run hounds.

Every eye in the party was now strained upon the goal ahead, the cliff.

The Indians they could feel were desperately near, and drawing nearer.

Seconds almost counted now.

The Indians, mad at the losses they had suffered, yet flushed with hope of revenge, were yelling like demons.

They believed that their triumph was assured.

Upon the cliff, looking like a statue, so still did he stand, leaning upon his rifle, was Buffalo Bill.

His eyes were taking in the whole situation.

He was taking in the situation just as it was, and like a skillful general he knew just when to act.

He had already brought the weapons of the outlaws to where he could grasp them quickly.

The outlaws, back from the cliff, had risen on their knees with excitement, and were peering wild-eyed toward the scout.

They could not see the sweeping mass of red horsemen beneath them.

They could not see the little band of whites racing for life.

They were trying to read the result in the actions of Buffalo Bill.

They might have just as well expected to see it engraven on the rocks about them.

"Men, we will make the cliff," said Walter Winston, through his shut teeth. The men cheered his words.

"There are the two rocks," he added.

"I know the trail up, sir, and it is a hard one, and steep and winding," said Scout Ball.

"You lead the way, then, and the pack animals go first," ordered the officer.

"Yes, sir."

"Now, all get ready, to fire as we reach the rocks."

"Those who have repeating rifles take cover and support the retreat of the horses first, and, soldiers, reload as fast as you can and fire as you climb!"

The order was given as the party was within a hundred yards of the cliff.

Another minute and the order came:

"Halt here!"

"Fire!"

They had reached the rocks, and halted together.

All ten of the men fired almost as one. The leaden hail did good work, for the Indians were not a hundred yards away now, and coming with a rush.

But the volley did not check other than the braves and ponies that went down under it.

"Why does not Buffalo Bill fire?" came in a gasp from Walter Winston's lips.

No one could answer him.

The horses were rushed between the two rocks for the steep trail.

The pack animals went first, led by Scout Ball.

But the Indians were firing now, and three of the riding horses fell dead.

Then Scout Sands threw his hands over his head and fell his length.

Rupert Rockwell seized his body in his arms and bore him up the trail.

One soldier, then another, went down, and Lieutenant Winston received a wound in the arm.

Another soldier got an arrow in the shoulder.

Matters looked desperate now.

All felt it, all knew it.

"Why does not Buffalo Bill fire?" again cried Rockwell.

"Why does not Buffalo Bill fire?" was once more asked.

The answer came at once.

The scout bounded before them, his arms filled with firearms.

He had come down the trail from the cliff.

He had come to share the danger personally of those who had boldly risked their lives to rescue him.

He was in their midst now, and had halted behind a boulder, breast high, that covered the trail.

He had with him his own and the repeating rifles of Corporal Strong, King, and Bob Brass.

Then, too, he had other rifles, those of the outlaws, and was weighted down with revolvers.

"Men, take these arms, and two of you reload your weapons!" he shouted.

They gave him a cheer. Hope was renewed, and into the very faces of the Indians was flashed the leaden bullets, doing work most deadly.

The ponies went down, braves fell in numbers, and the force of Indians were hurled back like a giant wave striking against a rocky shore.

They could not reach their foes, their comrades were dropping from their ponies, and death was playing sad havoc upon all sides.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE RESCUERS RESCUED.

The fight at the foot of the cliff trail was a desperate one.

The men who had come to the rescue of Buffalo Bill knew that he had rescued them.

They realized that his coming down to them in their deadly danger and bringing those firearms with him was their salvation.

When the rifles were empty the revolvers were used, and at close quarters these had done red work.

Buffalo Bill had been loaded down with the rifles and revolvers of the outlaws, but they had played their part well in the battle.

The Indians had come to the very base of the cliff.

Dead braves and dead ponies were piled up there.

Under such a terrible fire they supposed that Buffalo Bill and his comrades had come down from the cliff.

With a score of dead, and as many dying, while nearly half of their ponies had fallen and their chief among the slain, the Indians, who had come on as recklessly as demons, turned at last in desperation and stampeded.

It was a mad run for life with them now.

But not a shot followed them.

Buffalo Bill's command had been when they turned:

"Don't add to the slaughter, pards!"

"Don't fire on flying men!"

"You are right, Cody."

"But, God bless you, old fellow, for the work you have done, for you saved us," and Lieutenant Walter Winston wrung the scout's hand with both his own.

The others, too, came forward, and the officer said:

"Cody, I wish to present you to Mr. Rupert Rockwell, a gentleman from the east, who has come out here on an important mission, and Colonel Hughlets sent me with him as an escort to find you, for he wishes you to go with him and aid him in carrying out his plans."

"Mr. Rockwell you need no longer regard as a tenderfoot, after what he has done to-day, for he is as good a pard as any one would wish in danger."

The scout and Rupert Rockwell seemed to take to each other at once, and after seeing that the Indians were not to be supported in another attack by their comrades about the Tombstone Mound, the party began to look to their losses.

Sand, the scout, and two of the soldiers were dead.

The lieutenant and two more of his men had received slight wounds, while three of their horses had been killed.

"We will leave the dead here, sir, and can look after your wounds when we get upon the cliff, where I have some prisoners to look after," said Buffalo Bill.

"Yes, Pony Bob told me of your splendid achievement, Cody; but we will talk that over later."

"But, can we do nothing for the red-skin wounded?"

"A little, sir, perhaps, after we have seen to our own safety, for I noticed scouts dash away down the valley yonder, and they have gone to see if there are other soldiers coming, and how far off they are, so they can attack us with their whole force if they have the time."

"Ah, that will be bad."

"Only so far as our having nothing on the cliff for our horses to eat, and I am out of provisions, sir."

"Pard, I have plenty of provisions along: but the horses will have to suffer, I fear."

"We can cut them some grass to keep them from starving, sir; but first we will get all safe aloft."

This was done, for the pack horses and other animals were led up the steep trail, one of them carrying a soldier who had been wounded in the leg and could not walk.

The dead were laid side by side behind a boulder, and then the party went up to the summit of the cliff.

The prisoners already knew the result of the battle beneath them.

They knew that all hope had fled for them.

With scowling faces they watched the scout and his rescuers come up on the cliff, and they remained silent when Lieutenant Winston spoke to them.

To the corporal he said nothing, and the fugitive murderer remained silent and sullen.

The wounds of the lieutenant and soldiers were dressed by Rupert Rockwell, who had received his degree of M. D., yet never had practiced medicine, though why he did not state.

Taking the canteens, and a couple of the soldiers, with Scout Ball with him, Buffalo Bill descended the cliff to the spring and filled them.

They were all given water around, and holding up the heads of the horses, a canteen was emptied into the mouth of each one.

Several trips were thus made, some grass was cut for the horses, and a little wood gathered for the building of a fire to cook a good meal.

Under the guard of the three soldiers, the prisoners were relieved of their bonds for one hour, to give them relief and allow them to eat their supper.

As they all finished their meal, Buffalo Bill called out:

"The Indians are coming to attack us in force."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

ANOTHER DANGER LOOMING UP.

The scout was right—the Indians were coming to the attack.

Rupert Rockwell, Buffalo Bill, and a soldier had gone among the wounded Indians, giving them water, and dressing their wounds as best they could.

This was a surprise to the wounded braves they could not well get over.

But their comrades were preparing for revenge.

They had sent scouts to find out if there were other soldiers near and just how near they were, and in what force.

As their scouts had not returned, they had reason to believe that if soldiers were coming they were yet a long way off.

Hence the stern old chief decided upon revenge.

He would attack and carry the cliff if he lost a hundred warriors.

Was not Buffalo Bill there?

Did he not have half a score of men with him?

Then, too, there was an army chief—the lieutenant—half a dozen soldiers, a stranger from the East, and a couple of men in buckskin—the two scouts.

That would give them a score of scalps, as many fine horses, the clothing of the white men, their arms and ammunition, some provisions, and best of all, revenge.

They could afford to leave a number of braves for such a victory as that.

The old chief and none of his men had ever been up that cliff trail.

They knew that the cliff had been the village of an Indian race that had passed away, so they never cared to visit the spot.

The chief looked over his army.

He had sent runners out for his different bands, and smiled with pride as they came in.

He had over six hundred mounted men in sight, and half that number yet to come.

Some hundred of them were armed with muskets, a few with rifles, and a number with revolvers, all having bows and arrows and lances.

Let the soldiers come, he thought, for if they were not in large force he would wipe them out.

Thus would he gain a double revenge and arm many of his young men, besides getting many fine horses and much booty.

The chief and his under chiefs were in high glee at the prospects.

So the order was given to move on the enemy.

They came from beyond the Tombstone Mound, and a dread body they appeared.

They rode in one vast mass, and they sang a war song as they came, their horses at a walk.

The band that had been beaten back from the cliff was in the rear.

Their wild, weird song was heard by those on the cliff, and yet no one held dread of the result.

Buffalo Bill had said that a dozen men could hold that trail against a thousand. And they believed him.

They were not a dozen men, only seven to fight, all told, and the Indians were not a thousand.

But they had the cliff, they had had a good meal, and they were ready for the fight.

They had, too, the weapons of the outlaws, and those of the soldiers and scout who had fallen.

Then, too, Buffalo Bill had gathered several muskets from the fallen Indians, and nearly two score bows, and many arrows.

These would come in well in such a battle.

"Have no fear, for we can beat them back, mark my words," Buffalo Bill had said.

All the defenders, few as they were, felt confidence.

They had climbed the steep, zigzag trail.

They had made a breastwork of rock across the edge of the cliff, wide enough to protect all, and it commanded the trail from base to summit.

Let the red army come.

They were ready for them. All the weapons were loaded, the bows and arrows placed at hand, and small rocks gathered up and piled along the front edge of the cliff.

There were four of the prisoners to be freed to use them.

The Chief of Scouts had proposed that they should.

Not to be trusted with weapons they would have their legs still bound, with space between to move about, their arms free, and they were ordered to throw rocks upon the Indian mass below.

This would be a new kind of warfare, and very demoralizing, Buffalo Bill thought, to the redskins.

Corporal Dave Strong had asked to be one of the four men.

The scout had sternly refused, as had also Lieutenant Winston, to whose company he had belonged.

Bob Brass had also been a volunteer.

So had King.

But Buffalo Bill had also refused.

He selected the four men who had given him the least trouble.

"Do your duty, men, and it will act in your favor at your trial.

"Think what you are ordered to do, and I'll assure you that you will not suffer the more.

"I shall keep my eye upon you, and the man I see playing off, and not throwing those rocks as they should be thrown, and can be thrown to kill, I shall remind him that I am watching him by clipping him with a bullet."

"We'll do right, you bet," said one.

"You bet we does," another added; "we do jist right."

"It will be the first time you ever did, so it will be well to make the exception, if you don't wish a finger or an ear clipped off."

The four men looked downcast at this threat, and one voiced the sentiment of all when he said:

"I guess it's easier ter throw stones at Injuns, than to nurse a gone finger or ear."

"And it may be more than a lost finger or ear, for I am not just sure my aim will hold good, after the trouble you have all given me," significantly returned the

Chief of Scouts, and the four men understood his meaning but too well.

In the meanwhile, the mounted army of redskins was nearing the cliff.

CHAPTER XLIX.

AWAITING THE STORM OF DEATH.

It was a brave sight, indeed, to see that little band of seven men, three of them with wounds, standing at the rock breastwork at the head of the trail, and waiting to face a force of nearly a hundred to one against them.

Seated on the cliff, a hundred feet from the breastwork, were their forced allies, the four outlaws, who had their arms freed for the work they had to do.

Their legs were bound with a walking space, so that they could move about readily, yet not run off along the cliff, though escape in that direction was impossible.

The steep trail was the only way of reaching or leaving the old home of the Cliff Dwellers, unless they sprang off from the dizzy height of several hundred feet.

By each outlaw was a pile of rocks, ranging in weight from three pounds to twenty, and which would be sure death to the brave or pony whose head it dropped upon.

About the base of the cliff there would be hundreds of Indians, while as many more would be crowding up the steep trail.

With each pile of stones, numbering several hundred, they would prove a most able ally in the battle of the cliff, if the four outlaws threw them as they were ordered to do.

If they did not obey Buffalo Bill's orders they knew just what to expect.

The rest of the gang of outlaws envied these four, for they were free.

They had been tied securely again, and could but wish that it had not been so.

They were sullen now, and almost hopeless of rescue.

So often had Buffalo Bill foiled all attempts at escape, all efforts at rescue, they began to feel that he was not to be downed by any danger, obstacle, or numbers.

"That man Cody is not to be whipped," said King, disconsolately.

"A stray bullet may yet do the work for him," added the more hopeful Bob Brass.

"The lead is not mined yet for the bullet that will kill him," Corporal Strong said.

"Well, I wish it was all over one way or another, for suspense is worse than hanging," King rejoined.

"Can't we get a sign to those four lucky devils yonder to play off and not hurt an Indian?" asked Bob Brass.

"Don't you know they dare not with Buffalo Bill's eye upon them?" was King's remark.

"That is so, captain."

"And more, they will work to please Cody, for they will hope to have it help them on hanging day," the corporal said.

So they talked on, while the advancing redskins got so close to the cliff, though yet some distance off, that they could no longer see them.

They still heard the rumble of the ponies' hoofs, mingling with their shrill, discordant war song, as they continued to still advance.

"They look dangerous, Mr. Cody," said Rupert Rockwell.

"Yes, and we would find them terribly so, sir, if we were not up here, for no better position could be had for us."

"Right you are, Cody, and your wonderful knowledge of this country enabled you to pick your fighting places," the lieutenant remarked.

"The Tombstone is the best place, sir, if we had a larger force to defend it, as there is water, wood, and grass there.

"Here we could not stand a very long siege without giving up; but fortunately help will soon be here, and I only hope it will be force enough.

"I wish now that I had ridden out

while I could to meet the command and send back for more soldiers."

"You would have had to take desperate chances to escape from the valley, Cody, and dodge the scouts sent by the Indians."

"Yes, lieutenant, but I think I could have made it, and I feel certain that the Indians we see are not all there are to come, for that is the old head chief they call Colonel Coyote, and when he leaves his village he always has a thousand braves or more within close call of him."

"I hope, indeed, that Colonel Hughlet has sent a large force, and he would quickly do so if he knew or suspected that it was the old chief, Colonel Coyote out on the warpath, for we all know what that ancient red devil is capable of, Cody."

"He loves to fight palefaces better than anything else on earth," was the reply of Buffalo Bill.

In the time that this conversation was going on the Indians had advanced to within range of the repeating rifles of the palefaces.

But there was no desire to show what they could do.

They could wait until no shot would be thrown away upon the crowded mass of red riders.

The wounded redskins had crawled near to the cliff to get out of the way of the coming braves.

They had felt the power of the whites, and they knew that a desperate battle must be fought to subdue them, that the number of dead and wounded would be largely added to.

But they had hope in their comrades—they would win.

CHAPTER L.

A DEATH STRUGGLE.

The Indians rode boldly forward, their wild war song reaching the ears of the few on the cliff to oppose them, yet blanching no cheek, causing no tremor of fear.

Those were brave men there to face the odds against them.

Even Rupert Rockwell seemed not in the least disturbed, though such scenes were doubtless new to him.

Buffalo Bill was quiet and watchful, yet not in the least disturbed, if his face was a criterion of his feelings.

Expecting the palefaces to open at long range, the redskins held their reins in hand and were ready for a grand dash the moment a shot was fired.

But no shot came.

Lieutenant Winston had said:

"This is your play, Cody, for I am only an aider and abettor in this fight."

"Run it to suit yourself and call upon me to do what I can to help you, and you know that means those with me."

"You have done much phenomenal work thus far. I wish you to keep it up."

"Thank you, lieutenant, and I know well what I may expect in your aid."

"I shall not fire on the Indians until they attempt to come up the trail."

"I believe it is best, and then do quick and deadly work, for that will tell."

"Help from the fort should be here by sunset at least."

"I only hope help sufficient will come, sir."

"See, those reds are puzzled because we do not fire upon them."

"They are as uneasy as cats in a strange garret, I can see."

The Indians were singing their war song, but every eye was upon the cliff.

All seemed to be waiting for a surprise.

They were now almost under the shadow of the cliff, and suddenly, as though to break the suspense of the silence of the palefaces, they uttered one wild yell and dashed up close to the spur.

Still there came no shot from the cliff.

The redskins were certainly uneasy.

The old chief shouted an order, and his braves dashed between the rocks to ascend the trail on horseback.

"They don't like climbing," said the scout dryly, and he continued:

"I'll let the outlaws open the fight."

"Ho, there, stone throwers, start in on your work, for if you can stampede the gang it will save many lives."

The four outlaws set to work with a will.

Four large stones went flying over the cliff, followed by others in quick succession.

There was a whirring sound above the Indians' heads, and right into the crowded mass of humanity the deadly missiles began to fall.

The shock was terrible, and for a moment it seemed as though this novel mode of warfare would stampede the band.

Warriors fell from their ponies with crushed skulls.

Ponies went down with broken heads.

All were momentarily thrown into a panic.

But the thunder tones of the old chief, Colonel Coyote, rallied his braves, and they moved out of range of the stones, then made a rush for the steep trail.

Then Buffalo Bill shouted:

"Now let them have the lead!"

There was a volley of firearms, followed by the cracking of the repeating rifles rattling forth their deadly discharge.

The braves went down by the half dozen, and ponies were piled high at the foot of the trail.

The whole band recoiled before the terrible fire, and this gave the palefaces a chance to reload their weapons.

But the old chief's deep tones rallied his warriors, and they rushed to the trail once more, now on foot, as they were ordered to do.

The trail was black with them as they bounded up the steep way.

But again the rifles rang out, and once more the head of the Indian column melted away.

A third time they came up the trail after their recoil, this time led by old Colonel Coyote, who seemed to possess a charmed life.

Again the rifles opened, and now the Indians had gotten further than before up the trail.

But again they melted away.

There in the midst of his dead stood old Colonel Coyote, shouting to his braves to come on.

"Don't kill that brave old chief," shouted Buffalo Bill, his admiration being great for the brave Indian leader.

"This is slaughter—why will they come on?" he said a moment later.

The Indians who could not get to the trail were firing with their rifles, and the air was filled with clouds of arrows.

But few reached the top of the cliff, falling short.

The outlaws were hurling stones down upon the Indians, and suddenly Buffalo Bill shouted:

"Stop that! it is barbarous work, and we can keep them off without it."

A moment after he cried:

"This is terrible!"

"Yes, Cody, can it not be stopped?" asked Lieutenant Winston.

"I will try."

With this he sprang over the rocky barrier down the trail, and advancing with hands upraised, the palms turned toward the redskins, he called out in their own language:

"Go back! the Great Spirit is angry with his red children."

"He will not let them destroy their paleface brothers."

"Go back, Chief Coyote, with your brave young men, for the warriors of the great white chief are coming hot upon your trail!"

CHAPTER LI.

THE DYING AVENGERS.

The act of Buffalo Bill in suddenly appearing before the Indians, and walking boldly down the trail, while he called out to them, was a complete surprise.

Every voice was hushed instantly.

Every Indian ceased firing.

A silence of death followed, and every eye was upon the bold scout.

He spoke their language well, his voice was loud, clear, and resonant, and each word he uttered they heard.

They seemed to feel that it was no trick, for the dead about them showed how they were suffering, and yet they had not gotten half way up the trail.

The Indians appeared to take the scout's humane act just as it was intended, at least Chief Coyote did.

He, too, raised his hands. He was at the head of his warriors in the forlorn hope, and yet was untouched by a bullet.

On foot, too, he had been climbing the steep trail, his braves falling about him in numbers.

"The great white chief, Pa-e-has-ka (Buffalo Bill's Indian name) has spoken well."

"I will go with my dead and my dying young men, for the Great Spirit protects Pa-e-has-ka."

But as he spoke Buffalo Bill glanced down the valley, and far off he saw a moving mass of horsemen.

He pointed instantly toward the coming horsemen and cried:

"My eyes see the white braves coming to strike at Chief Coyote for leading his young men upon the warpath."

"Others will follow—see!"

But the redskins had already seen the soldiers in the distance, as the scout first pointed them out.

Their scouts sent in that direction had not returned to give an alarm, so they had not looked for trouble from the soldiers.

The old chief knew now that he had to fight, and to do so successfully he must seek the Tombstone Mound.

Instantly he thundered forth his orders to his braves, and there was mounting in hot haste by all save those he ordered to carry off their wounded and dead comrades.

But this was no easy task, and the Indians found that if they could carry the wounded with them they would accomplish much.

But the soldiers had already discovered them, and were forming in line of battle to thus advance.

They looked in large force to the redskins, but seen from the cliff, Buffalo Bill knew just how many there were, and said:

"There is but one troop."

"If more are not following, Lieutenant Winston, it will be a wipe-out for them."

"I will go and meet them, sir, so messengers can be sent back for reinforcements, and that troop must make a bold bluff to get here for protection, as Colonel Coyote is rapidly getting more warriors, you see," and Buffalo Bill pointed to where other bands were coming down the valley.

The scout's horse was quickly saddled and bridled, and Lieutenant Winston said:

"Let me go, Cody, for you cannot be spared here."

"No, sir, I will go, for it may be that I shall have to ride on to the fort, as I know the short cuts."

Calling to his horse to follow him, Buffalo Bill started down the steep trail on foot.

He knew if discovered the Indians would divine his motive and try to head him off.

He was not long in being discovered, and fully a hundred warriors were thrown forward to intercept him.

But he continued on down the trail, reached the dead braves that blocked it, and rode over them, and further down had to leap across the slain ponies.

Here and there he saw amid the slain braves a wounded one, who had not been carried off by his comrades in their hasty flight, and he had just time to cry out in the Indian tongue:

"If you let that arrow fly I will kill you!"

The Indian warrior had fitted an arrow to his bow to kill the scout.

He was badly wounded in the body, but he was game to the last, and had half risen on one arm to kill his foe.

But the threat did no good, had no effect on the dying avenger, and the arrow was fired.

It struck the knife hilt of the scout, glanced, and did no harm.

But for that knife in his belt the arrow would have pierced the body below the heart.

With a bound the scout was upon the dying redskin before he could fit another arrow to the bow, for he would not carry out his threat to kill him.

Tearing the bow from his hands he cast it beyond his reach just as a shot came from the cliff, and an arrow fell almost at the feet of the scout.

Buffalo Bill saw there another wounded Indian, fifty feet away, fall forward from a kneeling position upon his face and then roll over.

In his hands he grasped a bow.

The shot had been fired from the cliff that killed him, and it had saved the scout's life, for the bullet had struck the redskin just as he was about to let the arrow go, hence its force had been destroyed.

Buffalo Bill glanced upward and beheld Rupert Rockwell.

He had seen the wounded Indian's intention and to him the scout owed his life.

CHAPTER LII.

THE SCOUTS' RUN

Buffalo Bill waved his hat to Rupert Rockwell for his act, and Lieutenant Winston and the others gave three cheers for the man from the East who had followed the scout part of the way down the trail.

It was slow work making his way down the dead-strewn trail with his horse, for the Indians were riding hard to intercept him.

But he reached the base, and what he saw caused him to murmur:

"This is sickening.

"War is indeed appalling, for just see how these poor redmen are piled up here.

"There will be weeping and wailing in old Chief Coyote's village, and the end is not yet."

Leaping into his saddle, and grasping his rifle, Buffalo Bill dashed off in his desperate ride.

It was a dread gantlet he had to run, but he did not shrink from it.

On, on he went like the wind, while a glance up at the cliff showed him that there stood his friends watching his flight.

The Indians were riding at full speed, straight across the valley, to head him off.

Could they do it?

The troop of cavalry was coming up the valley along the base of the range, and toward the cliff, for they had seen the scout's signal there.

They were at a trot, and could see that the Indians were assembling about Tombstone Mound in very large force.

They had heard and seen the fight about the cliff and the retreat.

Now that the Indians were returning at a run, a band doubling the troop in numbers, they could not understand it, unless the redskins meant to cut them off.

At this Captain Sands smiled grimly.

A hundred braves would do little against his troop he well knew.

Suddenly one of the scouts of the troop called out:

"There is a horseman yonder coming toward us at full speed."

"That is what those fellows are riding for, to head him off," said Captain Sands, and he raised his glass to his eyes and shouted:

"It is Buffalo Bill!"

"We must ride for it!"

The troop uttered a cheer as one man, and at once their horses were put to a gallop.

Buffalo Bill was seen, meanwhile, to put his horse to his full speed and he fairly flew along the valley.

The pace was a terrific one, and the watchers on the cliff shouted with admiration.

The race now became a gantlet, indeed, and all realized it, the scout, those on the cliff, and the troopers.

The braves were lashing their ponies and yelling like demons as they believed they would head the scout off.

But the horse Buffalo Bill rode was the fleetest on the border, and he went like a bird.

The scout was seen to raise his rifle, as he drew nearer, and then shortly after a puff of smoke shot from the muzzle, and the sharp, ringing report was heard.

Down went the ponies, but no brave fell, that was seen.

"Cody is killing the ponies.

"It serves just as well, and he is ever merciful," said Lieutenant Winston.

The band of horsemen were not checked, however, but came on like an avalanche.

The soldiers were yet over half a mile away, the scout could press no further to the right, as a ravine ran there, and the Indians were not three hundred yards from him.

If they held straight on they would very nearly head the scout off.

It seemed a desperate moment for the scout and he knew it.

Suddenly he wheeled his horse to the left, and darted away straight toward the Tombstone Mound.

What could he mean. There was halting quickly by the Indians, turning about, and then a race back the way they had come.

But the scout had gained much while the Indians were halting and turning in disorder, and again turning his shots upon them and bringing down the nearest ponies, he bore away straight for Tombstone Mound, wheeled suddenly, and started down the valley toward the troop.

It was a most clever ruse, and successfully executed, the redskins howling in rage at having been outwitted and showering upon him a fire from their guns and bows.

But, though the bullets flew thick, none touched him, and, as he sped on, his foes now had to turn to face the troop.

"Halt! Fire!" were the orders from Captain Sands, and as the carbines rattled the troop was given the further command:

"Charge!"

But the volley had been a deadly one, and the Indians were in full flight at once, while Colonel Coyote was bringing other braves up to attack the troopers.

"Have you a courier to send back for reinforcements, sir, for the Indians are a thousand strong and more to come," shouted Buffalo Bill, as he rode toward the troop.

"Troops are coming, but I will send a courier, my brave Cody, to hasten them on.

"Do you know a place to which I can retreat?"

"Yes, sir," and as Cody dashed up and halted by the side of the captain, while the soldiers gave him a ringing cheer, he continued:

"To the cliff yonder, sir, and which you can hold against ten thousand Indians: but the courier, sir!"

"He shall start at once, and one of the best-mounted men of the troop was called up and given his orders as to what he was to tell Colonel Hughlet, but, if he met a force on the way, to report to the commanding officer, and leave it to his discretion as to what was best to be done.

Of went the courier at a run, while, turning to Captain Sands, Buffalo Bill, who had been watching the movements of the Indians, said:

"Now, sir, you will have no time to lose in reaching the cliff, as it will be well to halt to water the horses and fill canteens before going up.

"Old Colonel Coyote is the chief of that band, and he is determined to throw his whole force upon you, and his braves are desperate now."

CHAPTER LIII.

THE RETREAT.

Captain Sands knew that Buffalo Bill was seldom at fault in his prognostications of Indians' intentions.

He was aware that the scout understood the situation, and he at once gave the order to ride for the cliff in a gallop.

At the base a halt was made to fill the canteens and water the horses, and as fast as the latter drank they were run up the steep trail to the top.

Lieutenant Winston meanwhile had had the men lead the animals already on the cliff down to water, and refill the canteens, while each was allowed to crop a few mouthfuls of grass.

This gave them a hold against starvation.

Some dry wood was gathered by the troop at the base of the cliff, and as fast as the men could they took position among the rocks to fight back the redskins, now charging upon them with full force.

Buffalo Bill had asked for half a dozen men to be sent to the top of the cliff, to report to Lieutenant Winston and fight from there with the outlaws guns, while he remained below.

The men that led the pack animals up and the horses of the troopers did this, and all were in position to give the Indians a check as they advanced.

"Well, Cody, you have had hot work here, from the looks of the dead braves and ponies," said Captain Sands.

"Yes, sir, it was redhot for the Indians, but we were comparatively safe."

"You deserved to be, fighting the odds you had to."

"You have now tremendous odds to meet, also, sir, for there are a thousand reds yonder, if there is one."

"And you think there will be more?"

"Yes, sir, for Colonel Coyote always travels with a small army.

"I guess he wanted to make a grand sweep of it before he retired from control of the fighting forces, for the younger chiefs are anxious to come to the front: but here they are."

Buffalo Bill stood by the side of Captain Sands, behind a boulder, and where every man could be seen by them.

The troopers were scattered about on the steep side of the hill, behind rocks and where they could do deadly execution with their carbines, and with revolvers should the Indians come near enough.

Each man knew this danger, and that it must be a fight to the death.

"If they gain the base of the cliff, sir, the men can retreat up the trail, while Lieutenant Winston on the summit can protect them," Buffalo Bill had said.

Each man had been therefore given his orders as to just what he was to do, should they not check the redskins at the first volley.

The redskins were now in a mass, rushing directly for the cliff.

They felt confident that the fifty troopers and the men on the cliff were all that they had to deal with, and twenty to one against them, they were determined to wipe the palefaces out.

"Colonel Coyote," the old chief, was determined to end his career in a blaze of glory, or fall there on the field, and thus atone for his defeat.

His braves were with him heart and hand.

"Now, sir, they are coming within good range," said Buffalo Bill.

Captain Sands gave a glance at his scattered men and shouted:

"Throw no shot away, men!"

"Fire!"

The carbines flashed, and the leading braves and horses seemed to melt away. But on they came.

"We cannot check them here, sir, but on the cliff we can.

"We can cover the retreat with the officers' repeating rifles, those of the four scouts and mine."

The captain saw that Buffalo Bill had covered the situation well.

Nothing could check that tremendous force from carrying the position, and so he ordered a retreat up to the top of the cliff, just as the mass of redskins were near its base, and were throwing themselves from their ponies to make the climb to where the soldiers were.

The order was given, and the troopers began to run for the trail, which they had been told was not wide enough to allow of more than two men abreast.

With his own repeating rifle, for the officers carried such weapons for sport, he had two lieutenants and his surgeon also armed with them, while in addition there were four scouts in his command, belonging to Buffalo Bill's Rangers in Buckskin, as they were called.

These rifles, with that of the Chief of Scouts, made nine of these deadly weapons to cover the retreat of the soldiers with.

And nobly these nine men stood their ground and pumped the lead into the faces of the Indians, thus giving the soldiers good time to retreat.

But still the redskins came on, and the weapons were empty.

Showers of arrows, and bullets from the rifles and muskets of the redskins that had them, filled the air.

Several of the soldiers in the rear fell, and then one of the lieutenants.

Next one of the scouts dropped dead, and the revolvers were drawn and emptied as the little band retreated.

But just then from over the cliff came showers of rocks, and Lieutenant Winston was heard distinctly as he ordered:

"Now cover the retreat of those noble fellows!"

From the cliff came pouring down a rain of bullets, and the redskins about the captain and his little party were cut down by the score.

"Now we can run for it, sir," cried Buffalo Bill, and, carrying their dead with them, the men began to climb.

But just then Captain Sands reeled and fell, wounded at the same time by a bullet and an arrow.

Instantly Buffalo Bill sprung back to his side, and raised him in his arms.

"Leave me, noble Cody, and save yourself," said the wounded captain.

"I'll carry you to the top, sir, if you are dead when I get there," was the plucky reply of the scout.

CHAPTER LIV.

THE FIGHT WON.

Buffalo Bill kept his word, for he carried the wounded captain to the top of the cliff, and Rupert Rockwell and a number of soldiers came bounding down the trail to help with the dead the little band was carrying.

Close upon them came the panting braves, and there were hundreds in number, but strung out all along the steep trail two abreast.

Seeing that Captain Sands had fallen, Lieutenant Winston rallied the troopers as they came up, and carbines were hastily reloaded and two lone men stood ready to defend the summit of the cliff.

Others were placed with the four outlaws to hurl stones over upon the crowded mass of redskins below and to gather more of the deadly missiles to throw over, and aid them in the work of death.

The scout relinquished the wounded captain to his men, and wheeling quickly reloaded his repeating rifle, the others of his little party doing the same.

Then did the Indians discover their fatal error in making that desperate charge, for they were fairly mowed down while yet a hundred yards from the goal of their hoped-for triumph and revenge.

They could not stand that galling fire of death.

No human nature could do that, while upon the masses of their comrades below fell the hail of rocks.

With wild yells of hate, terror, revenge, and despair, they surged back from the fatal cliff, and those on the trail turned back again in a wild stampede.

"Cease firing!" shouted Lieutenant Winston, as he saw the wave of humanity surge back in retreat, and Buffalo Bill said, admiringly:

"You are the kind that make great soldiers, lieutenant."

"Thanks, Cody, I appreciate the compliment from you, but I could not fire upon my worse foe with his back to me."

The firing ceased suddenly, the rocky rain no longer fell, and upon the plain a thousand braves were flying for their lives from the terrible carnage they had rushed into, leaving a hundred or more dead and dying comrades, and as many ponies, as a proof of their splendid courage and how well they had done their duty.

The moment of the retreat Buffalo Bill had gone with Lieutenant Winston to see Captain Sands.

The surgeon of the troop had already extracted the bullet from his hip and the arrow from his shoulder, and said that the wounds were not fatal.

The dead had been collected, and were a lieutenant, scout, and half a dozen soldiers, and the thorough discipline was not long in getting all in perfect order in a very few minutes, Rupert Rockwell devoting himself to the wounded along with the troop's surgeon.

"I guess there are some of the Indians you can help, gentlemen, as soon as you have finished here," said Buffalo Bill.

"With pleasure, Mr. Cody, I will go with you now," returned Rupert Rockwell.

"I also, Cody," the surgeon said.

"I will go ahead, sir, with a small guard, for I have had convincing proof that an Indian is dangerous up to his last breath—but be guarded!"

He pointed far down the valley, and all eyes turned in that direction to behold a large body of soldiers just coming into view.

"You go, Cody, and report what has happened, and the exact situation," said Lieutenant Winston, who was now in command.

The scout was pleased at the honor done him, got his horse, and, as one of his own men and a dozen soldiers had already gone down the trail to clear it of the dead and wounded redskins, he at once followed.

It was well that a guard had gone with Rupert Rockwell and the surgeon, as they found a number of Indians very much alive, though badly wounded, several of whom had to be shot before they could be disarmed, though not until one of the soldiers had been killed.

"We will have to look to them, Cody," said the surgeon, as Buffalo Bill passed, and having reached the base of the cliff the scout leaped into his saddle and darted away toward the command now forming line of battle at the entrance to the valley.

Buffalo Bill felt sure that he would have another race for it, but in this he was mistaken, for Chief Coyote realized now that the tables were turned upon him. He saw a couple of hundred soldiers in sight, besides those on the cliff, and he knew now that it was to be a battle royal for mastery, and he formed his braves about Tombstone Mound with the skill of the able general he was.

Down the valley swept Buffalo Bill, watched from the cliff and with the eyes of the soldiers in line of battle upon him.

Night was not far off now, and Major Burbank, in command of the reinforcements, called out to his officers:

"Now we will know it all, gentlemen, for there comes Buffalo Bill, and he can tell us of the hot fight we heard a couple of hours ago," and, as Buffalo Bill dashed up, the whole line burst forth in a cheer of greeting to the King of Border-men.

CHAPTER LV.

THE MAJOR AND THE SCOUT.

The salute so spontaneously given the Chief of Scouts, he returned with a military salute to Major Burbank, and a wave of his sombrero to the men.

"Well, Cody, I am glad to find you well, after what Pony Bob reported of your situation, though I must confess that you look as though you had been through a siege," and Major Burbank grasped the scout's hand, the latter replying:

"I have been through the mill, sir, in fact it has been the toughest trail of my life; but I am glad to see you and your men, Major Burbank, as you can see for yourself they are needed."

"Yes, and like the Texan who needed a revolver, needed it bad," answered the major.

"You have about two hundred men, sir?" and Cody glanced over the line.

"Two hundred and ten, all told, Cody, consisting of two troops of cavalry, two companies of mounted infantry, and two light guns, while Sands has fifty, I believe."

"There are fifty-five at the cliff, sir, including myself; but old Colonel Coyote, the chief, has over a thousand braves now in the valley, and I saw couriers ride off for other bands, doubtless."

"He sent scouts toward the fort, but Captain Sands ran upon them, and so they were killed."

"I wish more troops were coming, sir."

"There are, for when I heard the report of the courier from Captain Sands I pushed a man for the fort with full speed, to bring more men, and a couple more light guns, with supplies for several weeks, as I knew that the Indians must be out in heavy force."

"They will not be here before to-morrow, sir."

"No, about noon to-morrow, if they push as I did, for you can see by my horses and men that I lost no time, Cody."

"It is your way, major."

"Well, when messages are sent by you I know what they mean."

"We heard the fighting two hours ago, and lost no time in getting here."

"Now, tell me the situation as it was and is."

This Buffalo Bill did, and it was decided to send one gun and a company of mounted infantry to camp at the spring under the cliff, while the main force encamped where it then was, at the entrance to the valley, so that constant communication could be kept open to the fort.

As the Indians were still at Tombstone Mound, and had not retreated, Buffalo Bill said they would either remain there to await other bands, or steal away in the night.

He believed, however, that old Chief Coyote was rather disposed to fight it out in the open, with his largely superior numbers, than to acknowledge defeat and retreat thus to his village.

The gun and mounted infantry company were at once ordered to the cliff, the piece of artillery being concealed in the march by the horsemen, so that the Indians would not suspect that "wheel guns" had been brought along.

Having started the force on its way Major Burbank asked Buffalo Bill to tell him of his remarkable capture of the ten prisoners, and his bringing them thus far on the way to the fort unaided.

In his modest way Buffalo Bill told his story, from the coming upon the outlaws to the last fight on the cliff, and the major said:

"Well, Cody, I am determined that you shall go through alone to the fort with your prisoners, for you deserve all the glory you can get out of this remarkable capture, and tough trail that you have been on."

"Get a good night's rest, feed up your gang of gallows-birds, and you can start with them in the morning."

"And leave you in face of a largely superior foe, sir?"

"Well, I know that will go hard for you to do; but I wish you to harvest the crop of tares you have gathered."

"They will be safe, sir, and I'll delay until we see what Chief Coyote is about, for now I think of it, he is not the red-skin to retreat and leave a hundred dead and wounded braves behind him, when he has a show of avenging them."

"You met Mr. Rockwell, you told me, Cody?"

"Yes, sir, he is on the cliff."

"Then you must know, now I come to think of it, that his mission is an important one, for he is in search of a brother who came west and joined the band of Gold Dust Jim's gold-mining outfit."

"Yes, sir, and he said that he had received a letter, written over a month ago but not signed, saying that his brother was held a prisoner by a band of outlaws up in the Sunset Range, and if not found he and others would be slain, unless they gave up the secret of where their gold was hidden."

"That is just it, and this Mr. Rockwell brought strong letters from officers of the army East, urging Colonel Hughton to do all he could to aid him, and hence Winston was sent out with him to find you, and together you were to go on the search for this missing outfit, for the letter stated that two men, or one, could secure the party, where a large force could not."

"So I understand, sir, and the letter further said that by going to a certain cliff upon the Overland Trail, that we would find further directions there, though how or what was not made known."

"Then, Cody, in the face of this, and as delay might prove fatal, it will be best for you to leave with Mr. Rockwell to-morrow, and see what you can find, while we will be within a short distance if you need aid, or, escaping with the outlaw prisoners, are pursued."

"I expect you are right, sir, for though Mr. Rockwell has not urged it, I have seen the delay has tried him greatly."

"I will start with him to-morrow, sir, but I would like to ask you to send my prisoners through to the fort to-night, for one of my scouts and two soldiers would be guard enough."

"Bring them here, and they shall go through," was the answer.

CHAPTER LVI.

THE FATAL AMBUSH.

Buffalo Bill returned to the cliff, as the shadows of night settled in the valley.

The soldiers sent by Major Burbank had already reached the camping place near the base of the spur, and were going into camp, with plenty of grass, water, and wood at hand.

The troop of Captain Sands had come down from the cliff to join them, Lieutenant Winston remaining in command of the home of the Cliff Dwellers, where the wounded captain and others were, with the dead and the outlaw prisoners.

About the Tombstone Mound all was darkness.

All knew that the Indians were there, however, and a double line of sentinels was placed about the camp.

Far down the valley gleamed the campfires of Major Burbank's men, and upon the cliff a fire had been lighted of wood carried up for that purpose, by which supper could be cooked.

Arriving at the camp, Buffalo Bill sent several of his scouts to patrol the distance between the two camps, well knowing that Indian scouts would creep in to kill any one passing to and from the cliff to the lower end of the valley.

Upon his arrival upon the cliff, Buffalo Bill found that his prisoners had been humanely freed from all bonds, as they were under guard, to give their cramped limbs a rest.

They had also been given a good sup-

per, and were turning in for the night when their captor arrived.

"Men, I am glad you have had a couple of hours respite from your bonds, and also a good square meal, for you have a long ride of it before you to-night," said Buffalo Bill.

"That means that you are afraid the Indians will whip your whole force to-morrow, so intend to run off to-night," sneered Bob Brass.

"It means that the force under Burbank will remain here to whip the Indians in the morning, and more troops are now on the way here to drive your red friends to their village; but you go to-night to the fort, so I'll prepare you for your ride now."

"That hangs us, pards," said Bob Brass, and several of the gang groaned.

Calling two of his men to aid him, Buffalo Bill had the hands of the prisoners soon firmly bound again, and then started them down the steep trail, their horses having been already taken to feed in the valley a couple of hours before.

Bidding Captain Sands good-by, and telling Rupert Rockwell to await him in the camp below with his own and his pack horses, Buffalo Bill mounted one of the extra horses, to give his own a rest, and the prisoners being now bound to their saddles, he started with them for the encampment of Major Burbank, accompanied only by one of his men in guard, whom he intended to send through to the fort with the captives, and the two soldiers who were to form the rest of the guard on the long night trail.

He had ridden about half the distance and had passed two of his men on the watch, when, as they were winding around a group of boulders along the ravine which the scout had ridden in his race for life in the afternoon, two shots flashed forth, almost under the feet of his horse.

Dead from his saddle fell the Man in Buckskin riding by the side of Buffalo Bill, while the horse of the Chief of Scouts sprung up into the air and fell backward upon his rider.

With his rifle slung at his back, and the startling and sudden death of his comrade, his own horse falling and catching him beneath his weight, Buffalo Bill was unable to grasp a revolver.

In fact, to have done so would have been his death, as a man bounded toward him, firing a revolver as he did so, and crying:

"This ends you, Buffalo Bill, and now, pards, you are free!"

A yell burst from the prisoners, a man sprung upon the horse of the dead scout, and another appeared, mounted and leading another arrival.

With a yell the prisoners greeted their rescuers, and ere Buffalo Bill could free himself from beneath his dead horse, the two men had dashed off with the outlaw band they had evidently been on the watch to try and save.

When Buffalo Bill staggered to his feet, bruised and half dazed, the prisoners were disappearing in the darkness and out of range of a revolver.

He swung his rifle around from his back and brought it to his shoulder.

But instantly he lowered it, and said: "I am supposed to be dead, for that fellow said he ended me."

"It is best that they think so; but I am a rather lively corpse they'll find out yet."

"Those two bullets the fellow fired came pretty near ending me, one just grazing my head, the other glancing upon my belt buckle; but a miss is as good as a mile."

"But wasn't I lucky not to ride my own horse?"

"Ah, my poor comrade Ball, they have done for you," and he knelt by the side of the slain scout. A bullet had pierced his brain.

Hearing coming hoofs, he sprung to his feet.

Then up dashed from two directions two horsemen.

They were his scout sentinels, and they called out together:

"Ho, chief, are you there?"

"Yes, pards, and the prisoners are gone to join the Indians, rescued by two men who were in hiding here among these rocks, and killed poor Ball."

"They shot my horse, and he fell upon me, while one of them gave me a few shots that were close calls and went off with that gang of gallows fruit."

"It was well done, and plucky; but they hit us hard in killing our comrade here."

"I'll borrow your horse, Dan, and go in to report to Major Burbank that my prisoners have escaped me and Scout Ball has been killed."

Mounting the horse, Buffalo Bill admonished the two scouts to keep a bright watch, and then rode on to the camp at the end of the valley.

It was a cruel, a bitter disappointment to him to know that he had lost his prisoners, after all he had had to do to capture and hold them; but he took it coolly; and riding at a gallop came upon another of his men, and to him told the story.

"I heard the firing, sir, and was going to see what the trouble was."

"It's all over now, Betts."

"Keep a bright lookout, and I'll return this way soon," and Buffalo Bill rode on to the camp to report his misfortune to Major Burbank.

CHAPTER LVII.

THE NIGHT TRAIL.

The report was made to Major Burbank of the loss of the prisoners, and the scout then said:

"I feel confident, sir, that old Coyote is receiving more reinforcements constantly during the night, and these escaped outlaws add to his force by a dozen desperate men, counting the two who made the clever rescue from me."

"It may be so, Cody, and I am confident that you know best," answered the Major.

"Now, sir, the man they call King is a very able fellow, I feel certain, while both Corporal Strong and Bob Brass are splendid allies, and can advise the old chief just what to do."

"That is so, and bad advice for us they will give him."

"Yes, sir, for they know our exact force."

"They do?"

"Yes, sir, as they heard all that was said when they were upon the cliff."

"True."

"Your force is a large one, Major Burbank, were the Indians only a thousand in number, but if they double that, why you will be put upon the defensive."

"I feel sure of it."

"Now, may I make a suggestion, sir?"

"Certainly, for all your advice I certainly know the worth of, Cody."

"It is not yet ten o'clock, sir, and, as you wished me to go on with Mr. Rockwell to find Gold Dust Jim's camp, I thought I would return to the cliff for him, get my own horse and his pack animals, and then start directly on the trail toward the fort."

"To the fort?"

"No, sir, toward the fort, for I know a short cut I can make that will save me over a dozen miles, and by taking it I can head off the reinforcements coming to you."

"But why head them off?"

"To guide them off this trail by a flank movement to the head of this valley and then hem the redskins in between three fires, as it were, counting the command at the cliff."

"I think I begin to see your plan."

"It will take us until noon to get into position, perhaps until night, for it is owing to the distance away the coming relief force is."

"And you mean that I am simply to make a bluff of attacking the Indians, to hold them in check until the relief reaches the head of the valley?"

"Yes, sir, for you will not be strong enough to venture far from your camp at the fort here, and I can send a courier to you telling when and where I reach the relief, and about the time it will take us to reach the head of the valley, making it a specified time for your attack, with the cliff force joining you, and the last arrivals to come in at the proper moment to aid you."

"Cody, you are a born general, and if your plan is carried out, if only a hundred men and a couple of light guns come to our aid, we will give these redskins a whipping they will long remember—yes, the Tombstone Mound will serve as a monument to many an Indian brave."

"But, what about Mr. Rockwell?"

"He will go with me, sir, for when we reach the head of the valley, we will be that much upon our way toward the Sunset Range, where Gold Dust Jim is supposed to be."

"Right you are; but send me word by one of your scouts of just the force that is in the relief and all other information you deem necessary."

"I will, sir, and now I must be off."

"Again, Cody, I must express my sympathy for the loss of your prisoners, after all you did to capture and keep them."

"Thank you, Major, but I hope to catch them again," and Buffalo Bill spoke hopefully.

"I trust so; but I am glad that it was no worse, that your life was the one spared."

"I always seem to be in luck, sir; but you will send for the body of my poor pard, and allow me a horse to ride back to the cliff camp?"

The necessary orders were given and the major warmly grasped the scout's hand in parting.

At a rapid gallop Buffalo Bill rode back over the trail, leading the horse he had borrowed from one of his men, and arriving at the spot where he had so nearly lost his life, he found the scout awaiting by the body of his dead comrade.

A short halt there and he pushed rapidly on to the cliff camp, and quickly told Lieutenant Winston, who was talking with Mr. Rockwell, just what had happened, and what his intention was.

"Well, Cody, your fortunate escape is worth a thousand outlaws' escape, so do not mind it," said the lieutenant.

"I have a sneaking idea, sir, that I shall get those fellows back again," replied the scout.

"I hope so, indeed, and I believe you are going the right way about it."

"I shall keep the way open between my camp and Major Burbank's, and you may be certain it will be sweet music to me to hear your rifles at the head of the valley, for, like you, I believe Chief Coyote is collecting a large force; but I will not detain you now."

Rupert Rockwell and the scout were soon after in the saddle, having had a substantial supper, and with the pack animals of the former in lead they started on the trail that was to prove of so much importance to all.

Passing through Major Burbank's camp just after midnight, the scout set the pace and led the way by the cut-off trail, which would save him all of a dozen miles on his way to meet the reinforcements coming from the fort.

CHAPTER LVIII.

BUFFALO BILL'S LUCK.

"Look there, Mr. Rockwell!"

"Yes, Mr. Cody, camp fires!"

"Yes, sir, and it is what the boys call 'Buffalo Bill's Luck,' for we have come upon the relief command just as we are turning into the regular trail, so we will be able to quickly be on the march for the head of the valley."

"You are lucky, Cody, as I have noted in our short acquaintance a score of times."

"I believe I am, sir, for somehow I escape many a bullet aimed to kill me."

"And may you always do so; but that appears to be a large force."

"Yes, sir, I have been looking it over, and from the camp fires would say there were fully two hundred men."

"Then that means a wipe out for the Indians?"

"If we strike them right, it does, sir."

"Lieutenant Winston seemed to think their force would be doubled by morning."

"So I think, sir; but with five hundred soldiers to meet them, we will quickly win, especially as we will have four-wheel guns, as the Indians call the cannon, for I suppose yonder force has brought artillery along."

The two had been riding along for over two hours on their back trail through the darkness, and they had come upon a hill, from which they had discovered a number of camp fires a couple of miles away.

The scout knew that it was the camp of the relief, and congratulated himself upon coming upon the command so much sooner than he had anticipated doing.

On the two rode at a trot, and, knowing how anxious Rupert Rockwell felt to be on the trail to rescue his brother, Buffalo Bill said:

"Now, we will not be delayed much longer, Mr. Rockwell, for as soon as we get the relief into position at the head of the valley, we will strike off for the ranch of the Gold Dust Jim outfit."

"I shall be glad when we can, Cody, I assure you; but I would not do anything to prevent you from rendering valuable service now when your presence is worth so much."

"The truth is, my brother left home to make his own way in the world unaided, and because he was under a cloud with our father."

"After he had been gone a year, the secret came out that he had shielded a friend in a crime, and was not guilty as accused."

"This friend was caught in a lawless act one day, arrested, tried, proven guilty, and sent to prison for a long term of years."

"His private papers fell into the hands of his sister, whom my brother Ramsey greatly loved, and she, discovering through them just who had been the guilty one, came to my father and told him all."

"Father at once sought to find my brother, but died soon after, and left him half heir with myself to all his wealth, where he had cut him off without a legacy even, when he had believed him guilty."

"As soon as I could settle up the estate, I set to work to find my brother, and at last got a trace of him in the Far West here, so started out to look him up."

"Receiving my mail, forwarded to the fort, I found an unsigned letter addressed to me, telling me that my brother had gone out with Gold Dust Jim's Gold Hunters, and he, with others, were held by outlaws for ransom, and to be put to death if it was not paid, or, rather, they did not make known where certain treasure was hidden."

"Now, Mr. Cody, you know just why I wish your aid, and am anxious to find my brother before harm befalls him, and I have perfect confidence in your ability to discover and save him, and will show you the letter I have with the directions given by the writer."

"We must find him, Mr. Rockwell, and I will try and show that your confidence in me is not misplaced," said the scout.

They had now drawn near to the camp, and a sentinel, hidden in a clump of pines, sung out sharply:

"Halt! Who goes there?"

The scout answered the challenge by giving his name, and they were soon taken to where Captain Keyes, the commander of the relief force, was having a late supper, for he had only halted for a couple of hours in his rapid march to aid those sent before.

The captain greeted Buffalo Bill warmly, and having met Rupert Rockwell at

the fort, extended also to him a most cordial welcome.

Then he heard the scout's report, consoled with him upon the loss of his prisoners, and congratulated him upon the rescue he had accomplished thus far.

"You have certainly had a hard time of it, Cody, and you, Mr. Rockwell, will soon become a thorough borderman the way you have begun, and in our Chief of Scouts here you have the ablest tutor upon the frontier," said Captain Keyes.

Then he added:

"But to my force, Cody, that you asked about."

"I have three troops of cavalry, two companies of mounted infantry, four light guns, and ten scouts, three hundred in all."

"Good! then there is nothing to fear, should old Coyote have five times your force, sir."

"Do you think I had best send a gun and a troop to Major Burbank, Cody?"

"A gun and a troop would be just what the major would need, sir, and one of the scouts can guide them there by dawn."

"The Indians would not know of their arrival, and I would like to send a scout ahead, sir, so that Major Burbank would know of their coming and could dispatch one of his guns to Lieutenant Winston at the cliff, for that would equalize matters."

"The very thing, Cody."

"But as to ourselves, now?"

"You can move in half an hour, sir, and I will guide you to the head of the valley, and we can get there in six hours' hard march and surprise the redskins, hemming them in between three fires."

"We'll do it, and we will move within half an hour, Cody," was the answer of the gallant captain.

Just on time the command was on the move, the force for Major Burbank going straight on the trail, and Buffalo Bill riding by a flank movement to the head of the valley.

CHAPTER LIX.

THE BATTLE IN THE VALLEY.

The scout led the command of Captain Keyes at a brisk pace by a very passable trail.

The men had been greatly pleased that Buffalo Bill was to guide them, for all had perfect confidence in the Chief of Scouts.

That there was trouble ahead, that the Indians were in large force, that something had gone wrong, they well understood, else five hundred men would not have been sent so quickly from the fort.

They soon were on their way, and crossing a stream soon after, a halt was called for breakfast.

Buffalo Bill pushed on ahead with his dozen scouts, and strung them out in a line back to the command, each one making a well-defined trail that the soldiers might follow readily.

Another halt at noon; then Captain Keyes would go on slowly, awaiting reports from the chief guide.

They soon came—that the Indians were attacking Major Burbank's forces, as the firing could be heard over the mountain.

Buffalo Bill saw by the trail that more Indians had gone into the valley than he had thought, so he sent a scout back to hasten the command on.

Buffalo Bill was then in the upper entrance to the valley, and leaving his horse he climbed a steep hill for a survey of the situation.

The main force of Indians was about Tombstone Mound. Large numbers of braves had been thrown out on each side to harass the two camps of soldiers as much as possible.

There had been a rush upon each camp, but the ponies and dead braves scattered about showed that it had been repulsed.

"They did not attack with all their force, but found out the strength of the

soldiers, and are preparing for a grand charge.

"Yes, they have considerably over two thousand warriors here, and they are now moving to the attack.

"Captain Keyes must push on, or they may overwhelm both commands in the valley, desperate as they have become from their losses, and thirsting as they do for revenge—ah! there comes the captain now."

Hastening down to the trail again, Buffalo Bill met Captain Keyes and Rupert Rockwell, who had ridden to the front with him.

"The men will soon be up, Cody. What have you discovered?"

"We have a large force to fight, sir, and—hark! they are moving now with every brave upon the two camps!"

The yells of the savages were deafening, and the thunder of the troops of ponies could be distinctly heard.

Another moment and the three light guns began to open from Major Burbank's and Lieutenant Winston's commands, and then followed the rattle of rifles and carbines.

The fight had begun.

Would the Indians sweep over the brave bands of soldier boys before help came up?

No! Into sight came a troop of cavalry, then another; then the mounted infantry and the guns.

They came at a trot; they wheeled into line across the valley, a gun upon either flank, one in the centre; the mounted infantry, dismounted now, protected the flanks, and they came just in time.

The hundreds and hundreds of warriors were pressing the two forces hard now, and it had come to a fight for life, indeed, for the old chief, Colonel Coyote, was willing to lose five hundred warriors to wipe out the foes there before him.

Interested in the battle before them, and with the din of battle in their ears, the redskins, a hundred in number, most of them wounded, the rest a guard left at Tombstone Mound, did not see or hear the reserve party in their rear until a volley from the infantry mowed them down.

Then upon the crowded mass of braves and horses in the valley the guns opened, hurling shells in their midst; the Tombstone Mound was carried, and the position gained for a stronghold, all the outfit of the Indian army thus being captured, and that fateful line of battle upon the rear of the fighting warriors attained.

The infantry fired deadly rounds; the carbines of the cavalry flashed incessantly; the guns roared death from their rifled rims, and the old chief, who, a moment before, had victory almost in his grasp, saw his braves go down by the score, saw them turn in dazed fright, beaten, demoralized, and crowding together in dismay as they knew not which way to turn.

They were hemmed in, and the soldiers were throwing a band of steel about them, for Major Burbank and Lieutenant Winston were advancing to meet Captain Keyes!

Old Colonel Coyote was struck by a shell and tore to pieces; other chiefs had fallen; still that circle of steel pressed closer and closer.

Suddenly a horseman dashed to the front and rode toward the redskin band then huddling together with desperate resolve.

The horseman was Buffalo Bill!

CHAPTER LX.

THE TWO CHIEFS.

"Cease firing!"

The order came from the commander of the guns in Major Burbank's command, from the captains of the cavalry, and from those of the mounted infantry.

The order was followed by Captain Keyes and Lieutenant Winston, also

willing to stop the carnage, and, as Major Burbank was the commander, his order was quickly carried out.

The horseman rode straight toward the Indians crowded together in the centre of the valley, silent and desperate, standing at bay to be attacked, to die then, as they supposed.

It was a bold thing for Buffalo Bill to do, but he did not hesitate.

He rode in a sweeping gallop, his hands raised above his head in token of peace, and halted within easy revolver range of the Indian mass.

"I come to my red brothers in peace; no arms are in my hands. I come for a talk with the chiefs of their young men!"

The words were spoken in the Indian tongue, and were uttered in a loud, clear voice.

A moment of awful suspense; then one chief rode out of the mass.

He was young, mounted splendidly, and rode straight toward the scout, holding in his hand a torn and bloody war-bonnet.

Halting, he held it up, and asked in thunder tones:

"Does the great white chief Pa-e-has-ka come with words of peace upon his lips, when I hold up to his eyes the blood-stained war-bonnet of my dead father, the great chief, Colonel Coyote, who has been killed by the wheel guns of his people?"

All awaited the reply, and it came boldly and defiantly:

"The braves of the great chief, Coyote, are away from their village, looking for paleface scalps. The old chief led them upon a trail of death, so let his son be the great leader to bid them follow him upon the trail of peace.

"My red brothers have suffered terribly; their young men lie dead and unburied; their braves lie groaning with wounds upon this field; their ponies have gone down by the hundred.

"The palefaces are about them; their wheel guns are ready to tear through their ranks; the white warriors are ready to send bullets into their hearts and to cut them down with big knives that kill by a blow.

"Let them listen to my words! Let them hear that the white chief of my people is here to bid them keep their weapons and their ponies; to have them look to their wounded, to bury their dead, to eat of the food he has brought with him, and to say to them:

"Return to your village and live in peace with your brothers.

"Has the young chief, the son of the great Coyote heard, will he heed, and become a leader of his people for peace, as his father led them to war, or will he close his ears and then hear the roar of the wheel guns, the rattle of the rifles, and see his young braves cut down by the knives before his eyes?"

"Pa-e-has-ka has spoken! He awaits the reply of the young chief."

Every word uttered had sunk deep into the heart of the young chief. His braves had heard also.

He had a large band of young braves, yet there were older chiefs who would now wish to rule the tribe.

The son of Coyote saw his chance, for the braves were broken in heart and frightened. He would seize upon the opportunity and become the Apostle of Peace, at least for the time being.

To his people a word would tell his true position. They were at the mercy of the whites then. They could be wiped out, and their tribe would no longer hold power.

He turned and rode toward his people, halted, and uttered a few words—a very few.

Then a chief cried:

"The Red Bear had a great father. The great Chief Coyote had a coward son. My young men will fight!"

The young chief, Red Bear, rode slowly toward the one who had called him a coward son of a brave father.

He halted near him, poised his lance, and cried:

"It is better that one chief more should die than my people be shot down like buffalo.

"I will kill the chief who wishes to see my braves die."

He gave a wild war cry and spurred forward, his lance already leveled.

The chief was ready to meet him, and stood his ground firmly. The braves sat breathless upon their ponies.

The result of this duel would decide them as to what they would do.

CHAPTER LXI.

TURNED BACK ON THE TRAIL.

Buffalo Bill had not moved from his position, in full view of the Indians and the commands surrounding them, and his eagle eye was watching the situation.

Did the Red Bear fall in the duel Buffalo Bill knew how great was his own danger.

The braves, still very strong, would make a rush to break the line of soldiers and escape from the valley.

They would leave hundreds of dead and wounded behind, would get no scalps, would have to sacrifice their outfit, go a couple of hundred miles to their village without food.

And what a tale they would have to tell! while the soldiers would be on their trail to attack their village.

Major Burbank wondered at Buffalo Bill's bold move. He had not been consulted, in fact could not have been, as matters then were.

Captain Keyes must have had some good reason, Major Burbank thought, for ordering Buffalo Bill to do as he had. Lieutenant Winston had the same thought.

But, Captain Keyes was as much surprised as was Major Burbank, for the Chief of Scouts had acted without his knowledge!

A couple of scouts had been seen to dash up to Buffalo Bill, a hurried consultation had followed. Major Burbank just then had ordered his men to cease firing, and then the Chief of Scouts had ridden with uplifted hands toward the Indians huddled together and preparing for some desperate move.

This was all that was known, and events following were eagerly watched.

Every eye was upon the two chiefs who were to fight the duel then and there for mastery.

The young chief, Red Bear, settled himself well in his saddle, gave his defiant war cry, and went at his rival with deadly intent in his eye.

The other prepared to meet him, poised his lance, and the two chiefs met.

The lance of one was struck up, the keen point of his foe pierced his breast, and he was hurled backward from his saddle.

The victor wheeled his pony, faced Buffalo Bill, and, riding slowly toward him, lifted his hands above his head and cried:

"My people lay down the hatchet! Let my white brother prove that he speaks with a straight tongue."

"Pa-e-has-ka is glad. He has spoken straight. He will bring the white chief to speak with him."

Wheeling his horse, Buffalo Bill dashed straight off to where Major Burbank was seated upon his horse.

"Major Burbank," said the scout, saluting as he rode up; "I have to report, sir, that the Indians, now under young Chief Red Bear, have surrendered."

"I acted as I did, sir, without authority, as two of my scouts reported that fully a thousand more warriors are on the march for this valley, and not twenty miles away, sir!"

"By Heaven, Cody, you did just right! I'll guard the passes into the valley at once Captain Keyes, force the upper one, mine the lower one, and Winston as a support. Now I will go and arrange with the chief."

The major gave the necessary orders to go into camp in the passes, but the men to keep their arms ready and remain in line of battle.

Then he met the chief Red Bear, and it was arranged that the Indians were to camp in the centre of the valley, upon a small stream, have their outfit sent to them, and provisions given them from the soldiers' supplies.

They were to collect their dead and bury them; the white surgeons were to care for their wounded, and, after a few days they could start on the way to their villages.

This attended to, as night was coming on, a couple of the guns, a troop of cavalry, and a company of mounted infantry were slipped quietly away to the head of the valley and placed there to meet the coming warriors, while a scout who spoke the Indian tongue well, accompanied by two of the redskins captured in the first attack of Captain Keyes upon Tombstone Mound, were sent off to meet the band that was coming and tell them what had happened, endeavoring to turn them back to their village.

This had been Buffalo Bill's suggestion to Major Burbank, for, did the large band arrive, they might influence an outbreak of those who had submitted, feeling confident in their increased strength to overwhelm the soldiers.

After most anxious hours of waiting the scout returned, accompanied by one of the Indians who had gone with him, and a chief and half a dozen warriors from the coming band.

They had heard the sad story, and the chief had come to see for himself the exact truth of the situation.

He was fully convinced, as the scout whispered to Buffalo Bill:

"There are not two hundred able-bodied warriors in the lot, Chief Cody, the rest being old men and boys. They only come to get booty, as they were sure that old Chief Coyote was going to wipe the palefaces off of the face of the earth."

"Then Charlie, this investigating chief, will be only too glad to get off and report to his people the situation, taking great credit to himself for bringing his command back in safety," said Buffalo Bill, adding:

"Now, I am about used up, but must start at once with Mr. Rockwell on our trail to find Gold Dust Jim, for if I leave camp by day I may be followed by some of these redskins."

CHAPTER LXII.

AGAIN IN THE TOILS.

To the surprise of the officers and the scout, the escaped outlaws had not been found among the Indians.

If they had joined them at all, and this they must have done after their escape, they did not remain with them. The braves professed to know nothing about them.

Buffalo Bill, however, was determined to have proof, and each one of his scouts had been ordered to go among the braves looking for white men painted and rigged as Indians; but, not one had been found.

"That fellow, King, is cunning and clever, and knew when to desert, for he was well aware that more troops were on the way, and that the redskins would be bagged or severely whipped, so he skipped. We will next hear of them at their old work on the trails," said Buffalo Bill.

"You are right, Cody; but now I desire to express to you my very great appreciation of your most valuable services," said the major commanding.

"But for you Captain Keyes would not have reached us in time to save us, and by leading him to the head of the valley, you simply hemmed in the Indians."

"By your boldness in going to meet them, you forced their surrender, and then checked the advance of the band coming to their aid."

"These services you have rendered all

of us, and your Government, while, before my coming, you certainly did a great deal for Lieutenant Winston, then for Captain Sands, while your capture and keeping possession of your prisoners as you did, was a most remarkable act of heroism, endurance, and nerve unequalled.

"Now you are going upon a very dangerous trail, and I wish to let you know before you go, and in the presence of my brother officers and Mr. Rockwell, who is to be your companion, just what we soldiers, one and all, think of you."

Buffalo Bill doffed his sombrero and bowed low at the very complimentary words of Major Burbank, who added:

"Let me say that I send a courier to-night to the fort with a full report to Colonel Hughlet, and you are the one to whom I give full credit for all that has been accomplished."

"Now, as you deem it best to start to-night, with Mr. Rockwell, I say goodbye to you both and wish you good luck. We will at least be here for some days, should you have to call upon us for aid."

"I will remember it, sir, and I hope to have to do so," replied Buffalo Bill, "for I have not given up the idea of catching those outlaws again."

Ten minutes after Buffalo Bill and Rupert Rockwell rode out of the valley leading their two pack animals.

"We will go a dozen miles, Mr. Rupert, then wait to see that we are not followed. If not shadowed, we will seek a good camp and have the rest we both so much need," Buffalo Bill explained.

After a ride of a couple of hours Buffalo Bill turned out of the trail to a canyon, where he knew there was a good camping place, and leaving Rockwell to unsaddle the horses, stake them out, and spread the blankets, he returned to lie in ambush upon the trail to see if they had been dogged from Tombstone Valley.

For ten minutes the scout had been in ambush behind a boulder upon the trail, his revolver and rifle ready, and lariat by his side, when he saw a horse and rider coming toward him on the trail leading to the Sunset Mountains, the same that he and Rupert Rockwell were following. The man came on slowly, but Buffalo Bill felt sure he was following him.

Another moment and the scout's lariat had been thrown unerringly, and, settling over the head of the rider, it was drawn taut, while, with a bound, Buffalo Bill grasped the rein of the startled horse, and a revolver held in the other hand covered his man.

"Surrender, or die!"

"I surrender, Buffalo Bill, for it seems my fate to be led to the gallows by you," was the quivering response.

"Ah! You are Corporal Dave Strong?"

"Yes."

"And your outlaw comrades?"

"Deserted me; left me, among the Indians."

"Hold out your hands for these irons." The man obeyed.

CHAPTER LXIII.

THE MANACLED MESSENGER.

The spirit of the captured corporal seemed crushed, and he obeyed the scout as meekly as a lamb.

It was a great surprise to Rupert Rockwell, of course, but explanations followed and the scout proceeded to question his prisoner.

"Now, Strong, I want the truth from you. Who aided those outlaws to escape from me?"

"Two outlaws, members of the band, who found out from the Indians that their comrades were your prisoners."

"They suspected you would send your prisoners to the fort at night. They laid an ambush for you, and you know the rest."

"They did not remain with the Indians?"

"They left yesterday, and so deserted me. I remained with the Indians, in-

tending to live with them; but finding that you had them hemmed in, escaped."

"I took the trail after the outlaws, but camped and saw you come along, for I knew you even in the dark."

"I then followed you, sure that you were upon the outlaws' trail, and that more was to follow, so I made up my mind I would get ahead and warn them, thus making myself solid with them."

"They have gone to Sunset Mountains, where the man you know as Bob Brass has a retreat and some allies. I do not know where this retreat is, but I intended to follow their trail."

"Dave Strong, I believe you have told me the truth, and I feel sorry that I cannot in some way repay you. I feel sorry for you; but my duty is to take you back to the fort, if I can get you there, and then I will say all in your favor I can, if you will aid us now all in your power."

"I thank you, Chief Cody, but I do not expect any mercy. I killed the sergeant in a fit of anger, and then had to take the life of the sentinel to make my escape."

"I will not be any bother to you, though you know if I can escape I shall do so."

Buffalo Bill and Rupert Rockwell made the man as comfortable as they could; then they turned in for the half dozen hours of sleep they so greatly required.

It was sunrise when they awoke. The horses were watered and staked in fresh grazing ground, a fire was built, a good breakfast prepared and eaten, and then they started upon the trail once more.

So sure had the now eleven outlaws been that the Indians would drive the soldiers back to the fort that they had made no attempt to cover up their trail.

Noting this fact, and conscious that he could track the outlaws to their lair, Buffalo Bill decided to make an effort to send back word for aid.

He did not wish to be hampered with the corporal, and, glancing at the prisoner as he drew rein, he said:

"Strong, I am going to send you back to the command on my horse, to bear a message to Major Burbank."

"You will trust me, then?"

"In a measure I must, and what you tell the major will go far toward gaining mercy for you in your trial."

"My horse is as obedient and sensible as a human being. I will change your saddle and bridle to him, and dispatch him to the camp."

"He will go there at a gallop, and, ironed as you will be, and tied to your saddle, you cannot check him if you would."

"You are to tell Major Burbank to send my scouts after me, twenty of them at least, and, if he will do so, have Lieutenant Winston also come along."

"They are to follow my trail. I will mark it well, and either Mr. Rockwell myself will head them off on it."

"If the major cares to send a surgeon along, also, I will be glad to have him do so, for I anticipate red work."

"I shall write this all down and pin it upon your breast, in case some Indian might put an arrow in you, for my horse will take you to camp, dead or alive."

The letter to Major Burbank was written, pinned on the corporal's coat, and his saddle having been put upon Buffalo Bill's horse, the intelligent and faithful animal was led back on the trail, turned loose, and then told to go to camp with his manacled rider.

At once he started off at a gallop, apparently fully understanding what was expected of him.

CHAPTER LXIV.

FOUND.

The manacled messenger started back for camp; Buffalo Bill and Rupert Rockwell started on their trail. The Sunset Mountains were just before them, and along their base ran the stage trail, but the coaches only went each way once each two weeks.

One was due, Buffalo Bill knew, upon the following day, and he felt sure that the outlaws would hold it up, as it often carried considerable gold.

The two men went along this stage trail, which the outlaws had also used, for their tracks were plainly visible.

It was well on in the afternoon when the scout drew rein.

"Look there!" he suddenly cried, pointing to a cliff a short distance off, and near which stood a man.

"Come! I can catch him with my lariat if he remains where he is until we get near him; if not, a bullet will halt him."

"He has not discovered us, you think?"

"Not yet, and seems to be very deeply engaged in cutting into the cliff."

They pressed on toward the cliff, but the man continued his work, not seeming to hear the hoof falls of the horses.

As they approached closer the man was seen to be roughly clad and uncouth looking in the extreme, with his unkempt hair and beard. More, they saw that the man was cutting into the soft stone that formed the cliff the words:

"Save us—"

That was sufficient to show that the man could not be a very dangerous character, or one of the outlaw gang; so Buffalo Bill called out:

"Ho, pard! your request is answered, for we are here to save you!"

The man started, dropped the instrument he was working with, turned quickly, his face blanched with fear, and beheld the two horsemen.

One look he gave, and then from his lips broke the cry:

"My prayer is answered! You are Buffalo Bill!"

"Yes, but I fail to recall where I have met you before, pard."

"Louder, please, for I am quite deaf!"

"So I thought," and Buffalo Bill repeated his words.

"I was a soldier at Fort Kearney when you were there; but I turned to gold hunting when I had served out my enlistment."

"I think I recall your now as Ned Roberts of the artillery."

"That's my name, Mr. Cody, and I was deafened by the bursting of a gun."

"Yes, I know you now; but what are you doing here?"

"I am a prisoner."

"Whose prisoner are you?"

"The leader of the Mounted Gold Miners, as the outlaw band call themselves."

"Tell me your story. How is it your captors allow you to go free?"

"They do not—see there!" and he held up a pair of steel manacles for the wrists and pointed to another pair for the ankles.

"I have a key that fits them, and between the visits of my guard, I free myself and go out on the trail, hoping to meet some soldiers or a party to save me. I know that the coach passes this cliff, so was cutting here a sign the driver would notice and so send us help."

"Who is with you?"

"Gold Dust Jim and a young man we call Rocks, but that isn't his real name."

"What is his real name?"

"Rockwell."

"Ah! Where is he?"

"He and Gold Dust Jim are in the canyon where the outlaws have their camp."

"How far from here?"

"About five miles."

"How many outlaws are there?"

"There were only three until last night Captain King came in with a man who is his spy in the mining camps, and about a dozen men they had gotten together for holding up coaches and Pony Riders, and for robbing miners."

"I see. But why do they keep you a prisoner?"

"You see, I belonged to Gold Dust Jim's outfit, and we struck it rich, getting a big strike of paying gold for all of us by placer mining. We hid our

treasure and started out for horses to pack it to the fort, but were fired upon from ambush and four of our boys were killed.

"We three were spared and made prisoners, and they have been trying to force from us by torture and threats to tell where our gold was hidden."

"One of the outlaws was a wagoner at the fort when I was there, and I saved his life, so he sent a letter out for Rock's brother, telling how we were fixed."

"Now you know it all Chief Cody."

"And rest assured that you shall soon be set free, Roberts. Now go back at once to your camp and tell your companions that you have seen me, and that Mr. Rupert Rockwell got that letter and is here with me."

"Tell them that I have my band of scouts coming, and if they arrive to-night we will rescue you all. If they do not arrive, you are to look for our coming each night."

"Now tell me just how to reach your camp."

"It is hard to direct you, sir, but—"

"Never mind; we will go into camp and I will accompany you on foot. Then I will know."

The camp was found, and, half an hour after, Buffalo Bill was on the trail to the outlaw retreat, leaving Rockwell to await his return and watch for the coming of the scouts, for he did not doubt but that his horse had reached camp with the manacled rider.

CHAPTER LXV.

CONCLUSION.

Buffalo Bill returned to camp in the night, and found Rupert Rockwell on guard.

"I have been to the outlaws' retreat, and, at a distance, have seen them. They are all there, King, Bob Brass, and twelve others, fourteen in all. They are preparing to hold up the east-bound coach to-morrow."

"They are in a canyon, with two entrances that are mere crevices in the cliffs, but it widens out when you get inside."

"We can approach by each end, or go down by foot by way of the cliff, the trail Ned Roberts comes and goes, and which the outlaw who wrote that letter told him of. This trail one man can guard, so no escape can be made by it."

"Hemmed in they will fight hard, but we will have a dozen more men, and every one of the bandits will be killed or taken prisoner."

"I also found that King is the man who was known in the Red Willow Mining Settlement as Rex Ridgeley, and who disappeared, Bob Brass coming to take his cabin, while he went into the road-agents business."

"If my scouts arrive to-night we will make the attack, for delays are dangerous."

It was just an hour after that the quick-ear of the scout detected the thud of hoofs. Quickly placing himself in hiding on the trail he heard a voice say:

"We won't go no further to-night, but camp here."

"Lieutenant Winston!"

"Ay, ay, Cody! I know that voice!"

"My horse went true, then, sir?"

"Indeed he did, for here we are, Surgeon Taylor, twenty-one of our scouts, four soldiers, and myself, twenty-seven all told."

"Good! For, with Mr. Rockwell and myself, we will double the band in numbers."

"Have you discovered anything?"

"Everything, sir."

"Excellent; but how lucky you captured the corporal; but who killed him?"

"Was he dead?"

"Yes, he had been shot through the head."

"Poor fellow, though it was better so; but he left us all right, sir."

"So your note to the major said, but you have come in on the run into camp, as though frightened."

"Some Indians, doubtless, shot him, sir; but, shall we make the attack to-night?"

"At once, if you wish."

"Yes, sir; it is best."

In ten minutes the little command was on the march, and after going several miles Buffalo Bill showed where they were to divide their forces, Lieutenant Winston going with one party.

A scout and a soldier were led to the trail down the cliff by Buffalo Bill, who then went around with the rest of his men to the other entrance to the canyon.

It had been decided to attack just at dawn, Buffalo Bill informing his men that the outlaws lived in well-built cabins on the shore of a small lake in the canyon.

Leaving their horses in the entrances to the canyon, with one man to guard them, the two parties, under Lieutenant Winston and Buffalo Bill, led the way to the cabins, and a loud knock at the doors was followed by:

"Turn out, men! The prisoners are escaping."

It was Cody who spoke.

The doors opened and the outlaws came swarming out.

It was a quick, sharp, deadly fight, men going down on both sides, killed and wounded.

But it was a complete triumph for Buffalo Bill and his men, Bob Brass and six outlaws were killed, while King and the others, several of them wounded, were taken prisoners.

The attacking party suffered the loss of a scout and soldier killed and half a dozen others wounded.

In one of the cabins, apart from the others, were found the three prisoners, Gold Dust Jim, Ramsey Rockwell, and Ned Roberts, and happy indeed were they at their release.

Half a hundred horses and some booty were the results of the victory, while that day the prisoners led the way to where their gold was hidden, and it was carried into the camp of Major Burbank, along with the prisoners and captured horses.

The Indians then had taken up the march for their villages, carrying their wounded, and as there was no longer need for the troops to remain in the valley, the march was taken up for the fort.

This, Buffalo Bill's toughest trail made him more than ever a hero and the idol of the army on the frontier.

With the execution of King and his followers the Mounted Gold Miners were wholly wiped out.

The Rockwell brothers started upon their return East, where Ramsey soon after married the woman he had ever loved, and whose confession of a brother's crime had taken the shadow off of his life.

In their happy homes to-day Ramsey and Rupert Rockwell often entertain as an honored guest the great Scout of the Border, the man whom they knew as he was in all his bold deeds and adventurous life, and often tell of the terrible trail he followed in his pursuit of the Mounted Gold Hunters of the Overland.

THE END.

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